TWO LITTLE MAIDS AND CONCHITA.

MARGUERITE LOUISE VERDIER.

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TWO LITTLE MAIDS;

A TALE OF SOUTH FLORIDA.

AND

CONCHITA;

A MEXICAN ROMANCE.

BY

MARGUERITE LOUISE VERDIER.

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TWO LITTLE MAIDS.

A TALE OF SOUTH FLORIDA.

CHAPTER I.

"All the world's a stage."—*Shakespeare.*

"I CAN stand it no longer!" I exclaim in despair. I shall do something desperate!"

"Well, dear girl," returns Bess, "no action of yours, no matter how outrageous, could render us more wretched. I hope Uncle Nelson's shade is properly ashamed of itself for treating you so shabbily."

"Yes," I answer plaintively, "after being afflicted with such an unfeminine name, I certainly deserved a nice lot of money at his death. However, I cannot and will not stand Uncle Greyson's whims much longer."

Bess hugs her knees affectionately as she remarks reflectively, "Yes, I believe he grows worse every day. Did you notice how he 'cleared' poor Auntie down at breakfast, and how he scowled at every thing on the table?"

"Oh I could stand that if he would only behave when company is here. I really believe he throws those horrid shoes with his whole force, and I know his throat is sore from hard scraping. Visitors are

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my terror; the torture begins with their entrance and continues long after their departure."

"Would you not like to teach him company manners?"

"I would indeed. Nothing would give me keener joy than to become his wife for one week. He would rightly appreciate poor Auntie when I finished with him. But to the point—how can we girls support ourselves? I can perform on several instruments, paint and nurse the sick. Surely one of these accomplishments should prove lucrative."

"And I" laughs my sister, "understand nothing save housekeeping. Therefore, unless I procure the position of cook, I have no possible way of making money. I have lived with Uncle long enough to become accustomed to his ways; but it is hard on you. Really, though, he is not so bad when you understand just how to slip around his little angles."

"There is the difficulty. I never know when I tread on forbidden ground and am in constant terror of raising a storm. How was I to know, when I remarked that the Johnstons were nice people, that he objected to nice in that particular sense? Dearly as I love talking I would gladly refrain in his presence."

"But that only rouses his indignation. We *must* talk whether we wish to or not."

"Well," I continue, "my mind is fixed. I shall advertise for employment. By the way, where is the *Times-Union*? I will look it over for the sale of *Auld Lang Syne*."

"Oh, would it not be lovely to spend the winter in Florida? You have been there so often, but I, poor creature—here is the paper. Oh, if you could

only find an advertisement from some wealthy old lady who desires a housekeeper and companion to accompany her to that sunny land! Suppose you read the 'ads' aloud for my benefit."

"'Wanted—a boy to sweep out store and carry parcels. Terms $3.00 per week. Apply at No. — Bay St."

"How does that suit?"

"Oh go on!"

"'Wanted—a good wet nurse. Terms liberal. Apply at this office.'"

Bess shakes her head.

"Well, how is this?"

"'A young man of pleasing address would like to correspond with a young lady matrimonially inclined. Will exchange photos. Address X. Y. Z. box, No. 4.'"

"Not even his photo would tempt me," she says mournfully.

"Ah!" I cry, "I have found it!"

"My old lady?"

"No. Listen."

"'Wanted a young man of good education, to teach a mixed school. Terms $75 per month. Apply to Peter Schneider, M——, Fla.'"

"Now, Bess, that's the very thing. I shall address 'Peter Schneider' by the next mail."

"But, dear girl, you are not a young man."

"Certainly not, you little innocent; but perhaps my masculine appellation will assist me. My writing, you remember, is large and manish; at any rate, we shall have some fun. Now do not mention this to either Uncle or Aunt until we hear from our lovely Dutchman.

"You may fool the lovely Dutchman, but you dare not face him in petticoats."

"Oh well, we shall wait for his answer. Shall I ask if he needs a housekeeper?"

"No. I am sure he is a comfortable farmer, reveling in the charms of a red faced Frau and a housefull of children. But I do not know just where M—— is. Go on; I shall find it."

I write my letter and return to the sitting-room. Bess still bends anxiously over the map of Florida.

"I can not find it," she says dismally, "I believe it is a hoax."

"Nonsense!" I cry, indignantly. "Look in the southwest, far down, near the Everglades. It is either on a river or the coast."

"Why," she says in surprise, "how do you know so much about it? Were you ever there?"

"No, but Uncle Nelson and I met a young fellow last winter who was just from there. He gave such glowing accounts of the hunting and fishing that we really started, but found, before reaching there, the place had no hotel accommodations, so turned back. See, here is M—— on the C—— river, not very far from its mouth. Come, let us post our letter before dinner."

"I tell you Nel, if anything *does* come of that letter, we'll have a most terrific time with Uncle. *You'll* have to tell him."

"Very well, I'm not afraid of him; he knows it too, and respects me accordingly."

Ruth V. Miller
9953 Sepulveda Blvd.
Sun Fernando, Calif.

CHAPTER II.

"He is happy whose circumstances suit his temper; he is more excellent who can suit his temper to any circumstances."—*Hume.*

WE have posted our letter and are returning home, when Bess exclaims:

"By all that is disagreeable, here comes my devoted admirer Frank King! Hold the umbrella more that way, so he will not recognize us. I would not have him walk home with us for anything under the sun."

"Why? I thought him rather nice."

"Yes," hurriedly adjusting the umbrella, "he is all that and much more; but Auntie has a hobby for inviting people to dinner, and I know there is not a particle of meat 'to set before the King'—Uncle's latest crank."

We almost run, but despite our greatest efforts, a merry voice calls after us:

"Stop a moment, Miss Bessie! I never thought you would slight an old friend. I am convinced you were trying to evade me. Come, you may as well confess, for I shall never believe the contrary."

Mr. King has reached us, and is looking quizzically into my sister's blushing face.

"I was," she confesses saucily. "When the occasion demands it, I always emulate the Father of my country; though unlike him, I *can* tell a lie."

"You astound me!" he cries in mock dismay. "Are all young ladies so proficient?"

"Certainly! all can, but few indulge often. Lying, I believe, is a peculiarly masculine gift, perfected by long practice."

"Little girls should be careful and not say naughty things to their elders. But why did you run from me?"

"Shall I tell him, Nel?"

"Yes. Mr. King will then understand the situation, and like you all the better for being candid."

"As if that were possible!" he exclaims sentimentally.

"Then," says Bess, bravely, "when we get home, and Auntie asks you to stay to dinner, you must have a pressing engagement elsewhere—unless, indeed, you wish literally, to break bread with us. Not the least particle of meat will you have, for Uncle has taken the absurd notion that all animal food is injurious, and will not allow it in the house.

Now then, I hope you are satisfied—what are you laughing at? I must say, you have a strange way of expressing sympathy!"

"I suppose I should say something to console you," he answers, suppressing his laughter, "but, really, it is so irresistibly funny—you must excuse my unseemly mirth."

"You'd not laugh," retorts Bess, "if you were one of the poor victims."

"This is certainly a novel experience," he continues, still laughing. "Never, in the whole course of my long and eventful career, have I been requested to decline an invitation. Really, young ladies, you are too hard on me."

"We are your friends, young man,"

"I have half a mind to accept."

"Then suffer the consequences of your own rashness!"

"Is it meet and right that you—"

"It is not *meat*. I have told you it is neither seen, smelt nor tasted in our house."

"Then, if we become too ravenous, a little cannibalism should be allowed. I propose that Uncle shall become the first victim.'

"Yes," remarks Bess, "it certainly would be sweet to crunch his old bones. But" with an alarmed expression "would he not be awfully tough? You know he is not so young as he has been."

"When desperate through hunger, we never fret about trifles. But I have heard, that a 'pinch of soda' rubbed over tough meat, had a wonderfully tendering effect."

"Oh, there is Auntie—I hope she didn't hear our nonsense."

We had reached the gate near which Auntie was cutting flowers.

She is a sweet, gentle little woman, much too weak to struggle against the stern realities of Uncle's whims.

On seeing us, she came forward, shook hands with our escort, and gave the much talked of invitation.

With one wicked glance at Bess, he politely accepted.

"Nel," says Auntie, as in advance of the others we enter the house, "will you arrange a bouquet for the table, you have such taste—but dear me, I so wish we had even a small piece of meat; but your Uncle is so *very* peculiar. Do you think, dear, that we need any thing extra?"

"I think not. But what have you?"

"There is soup, potatoes, egg-plant, okra, tomatoes, rice, light rolls, corn-bread, buttermilk, and cream and peaches."

"'A feast for the gods'" quote I. "But you *do* need, and *shall have* both soup-plates and napkins."

"Oh, my dear child, I am so afraid your Uncle will make a scene—you *know* how he objects to both."

"I will bear the blame. *You* know how mortified Bess would feel to compel her admirer to wipe his mustache on the table cloth."

Our dinner bell rings at twelve sharp. The last sound is still vibrating through the house, when Uncle seats himself and begins eating.

He is a dark, stern man, upon whose face is stamped an expression of chronic discontent.

"My dear," says Auntie, one eye nervously regarding the door, the other fixed anxiously upon his face, "Young King is here."

"D——d if I care!" retorts her lord. "If you choose to ask every young jackanapes in the country to waste his time by lounging here, you can do the polite yourself. I'll be dogged if—hello, King! Waiting for you, you see. I make a point of always being on time, and wait for no one. Help yourself; you have more time than I."

And he proceeds again to gobble.

Bess, on seeing her napkin, gives me one grateful look, then adroitly slips it into her lap without attracting undue attention.

Mr. King, however, quite unconscious of the wrath to come, unfolds his in such a leisurely manner, that the evil eye is fixed upon him.

"What *fool*" exclaims our ogre, "put these

cussed things on the table?" and before any of us could utter a word, he seized the nearest napkin, ring and all, and flung it violently across the room.

Poor Auntie looked as if she would cry. She gulped it down, however, and bit her lips.

"Uncle," I say, looking him calmly in the eye, "I arranged the table, and am accountable for all objectionable articles. You remember our agreement."

"Yes, yes;" he answers hurriedly, "do as you please, only give up that fool notion of working for yourself. This young lady, King, wants to teach, nurse or do anything to render herself independent of cross old Uncle."

"Why not?" asks the young man, "Girls are far more happy when usefully occupied.

"Tut, tut! utter nonsense! Now see here, would you allow *your* sister, if you had one, to make her her own living?"

"If I had a dozen sisters, each should follow the occupation for which she felt best fitted. Why, my cousin, Ida F—— is considered one of the finest surgeons in the State. Dr. S———you know his reputation—won't perform a difficult operation without her assistance."

"Humph! I've heard of her—exceptional case. Few women could do it. Too nervous and hysterical. My wife, there, faints at the sight of blood—a pretty surgeon she would make!

No, sir, women had better keep in their own sphere, and let men's alone! A rare exception only proves the rule. But I cannot sit here and talk all day; I have my work to do."

Out he stalks, leaving three crushed and deeply mortified females, and one amused though gravely polite male.

"Excuse me," falters Auntie, rising to escape, "I hear the cat in the pantry."

"You wretch!" cries Bess, turning her angry eyes upon our guests. "Oh, how I wish he had slung it at you!"

"Thank you," he returns with a laugh, "This is altogether, the most delightfully unique affair I ever attended. Do you have such treats every day, or does he reserve himself for strangers?"

"Can you not see that she is really distressed?" I ask indignantly.

"Miss Bessie," he begs, now quite contrite, "forgive me." You know, 'to err is human.'"

"But," she retorts from the half closed door,"as I am far from divine, I will get even with you, or my name is not Bessie Kieth!"

CHAPTER III.

"We must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures"—*Shakespeare.*

MORE than two weeks have passed since we mailed my letter to Peter Schneider, and our anxiety for an answer increases with Uncle's cranks. Poor fellow! I believe he developes a new one every day. Now, Uncle is not a bad man; yet he manages to make himself and all around him *hopelessly* unhappy. I sometimes think if Auntie and himself were more congenial, life would be more endurable; but as they have no tastes in common and many that clash, our domestic calm is often disturbed. To be sure, Auntie yields, though never without a struggle; and broods continually over her "wrongs." Had she asserted herself in the beginning, they would now, in all probability, be reasonably happy.

But now, with neither love or respect for each other, they are merely struggling through a miserable existence.

I never knew them intimately until last May when Uncle Nelson died. Uncle Nelson was Father's brother; he adopted me when my parents, stricken with that fell destroyer, small pox, died within an hour of each other.

He treated me in all respects as a well loved daughter, and spoke of me always as his heiress.

On his death, however, the only will found was

one made before my birth, in which he left every thing to a Scotch cousin.

John Brownlow, Uncle Nelson's lawyer, swore that he had drawn up a will in my favor, had seen it signed and duly attested, but we never found it.

He wrote these facts to my Scotch cousin, proposing to divide the property, and received the following answer:

"JOHN BROWNLOW, Attorney at Law.

Dear Sir,—My cousin can expect nothing from me. Had my Uncle wished her to inherit any portion of his property, he would undoubtedly, have left his later will in a convenient place. His failure to do so, bespeaks, to my mind, a regret for the money already lavished upon her. I am, sir,

Yours with respect,

ALAN DOUGLAS KIETH,

Aberdeen, Scotland, May 25, 18—."

Life looked dark, indeed when Uncle Greyson, mother's brother, came to take me to his mountain home. "Bessie has been with us these fifteen years," he said kindly, "and when you join us, the family will be complete."

Both he and Auntie are very kind (in their own peculiar way) but the life is too cramped, and so terribly embittered. Yes, I must work out my own destiny, be it good or bad.

Ah, there comes Bess, just from the post-office.

"Come out," she calls. "I have something for you."

"The letter?" I ask eagerly.

"Yes, the precious letter," she replies, handing it to me.

"Did you ever see such strange writing? I seriously doubt your ability to read it."

It is peculiar, but as I answered most of Uncle Nelson's letters, I feel well versed in hieroglyphics. This, however, is the oddest I have ever seen.

M——, Fla., Aug. 18, 18—.

"MR. NELSON KIETH:

Dere Sur—Yo ablikashun for de M—— scool haf been oxcept, und de school mus' pegin mit Oct. 1st. Me always vornt vomans deacher, but de mans tink dot vomans not manage dese pig poys.

You got vomans coom long mit you und tech music, he pay you mooch little moneys.

Yours respeckful,

PETER SCHNEIDER, Trustee."

"What a jewel!" cries Bess, clapping her hands "How delighted he will be to find that you are 'vomans.' Dear old fellow, I feel like embracing him!"

"Wait till you see him," I return with a laugh. "He may not prove a pleasant subject for such demonstrations. Then, again, his *Frau* might object."

"Why, this is the 10th of September," says Bess. "Have they any railroads in Florida, or is the mail carried on foot?"

"Not many," I return, "but this letter has probably missed connection. It will not require more than a week to make the journey. And now, the unpleasant task of telling Uncle must be gotten over. I know he will fret but we can endure any thing with the prospect of freedom before us."

"But he will make our lives a burden, till we go," returns Bess.

And he did. Weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth prevailed. So great was his wrath that, after

belaboring the hands, who were entirely innocent, bringing Aunty and Bess to tears, he positively refused to speak to me, "the ungrateful young woman" he had taken to his heart and home in the hour of her distress. Long and furiously raged the storm; but, like Joey B—— I am "tough sir, tough, *devilish* tough," so stood safe on the good rock Determination, while the angry waves of passion swept o'er our troubled sea.

Finding that his rage only strengthened my resolve, he declared he would wash his hands of the entire affair, and if I got into serious trouble before the winter ended, I need expect no assistance from him.

Though we knew poor Auntie would miss us far more than Uncle, she said privately (she dared not in his presence) that she did not blame us for going.

"I know," she sighed plaintively, "it will be simply delightful to do and say just what you please. I wish I were going too."

"Do!" cries Bess, "what fun we would have!"

"Ah!" returns Auntie, your Uncle would never forgive me."

"Why Auntie," I say to cheer her up a little, "when Bess succeeds in captivating the charming Peter, you'll have to come to the wedding."

"Yes," laughs Bess, "only think of having real orange blossoms to grace the affair! Isn't it too heavenly?"

"I *may* cut you out," I say teasingly.

"You indeed? who would look at a dark little object like you, when my pink and white loveliness is nigh? No, sister mine, 'tis not you I fear, but a red faced Frau, and a half dozen little Peters."

Time passes slowly, but it finally brings the day of our departure.

Though it may sound heartless to those who witnessed Auntie's tears, and Uncle's real sorrow, we thoroughly enjoy our journey.

I am an old stager, but Bess, who had never before left home, found every thing delightfully novel.

At Jacksonville, we had what she termed "a real adventure."

The train was just starting, when two young men, heavily loaded with sundry hunting and fishing equipments, jumped aboard and began searching for seats.

Bess and myself had appropriated entire seats, and were just preparing to "make ourselves small," when the young fellow in advance of his companion asked:

"May I share your seat, Madame?"

"Certainly." I reply. "Or, better still, I will return to my sister and give place to your friend."

Both gentlemen bow, and thank me, then stow themselves and belongings just in front of us.

"Are they not handsome? whispers Bess.

"I don't know," I answer. "I hardly looked at them."

"What a pity!" she exclaims. "Both blondes, and the one that spoke has the *sweetest* mustache—true gold. Can't you make him turn around?"

"Why?"

"So you can see it." she returns innocently.

"Very well," I answer much amused. "Which is he?"

"The one just opposite you." Leaning forward, I touch him with my fan. He looks around inquiringly.

"Hand me my bag, please."

"Your bag?" he says in a puzzled way.

"Yes, my hand bag. It is in the rack—see?"

I see now, he is a remarkably handsome man.

"Ah, excuse my stupidity," he exclaims, showing his fine white teeth.

"Thank you." I reply, and pick up my novel. He turns, and begins conversing with his friend.

"Don't you think so?" asks my sister.

"Yes," I answer. "Now, dear girl, as you will see very little of interest between here and P——, I would seriously advise a novel."

"No, indeed," says Bess.

"'The proper study of wo-mankind is man'; therefore I shall devote myself to the two in front."

The strangers are kind, though unobtrusive.

I incidentally mention having traveled the road before, when one of them—he of the hand-bag—says appealingly, "Then, you should take us poor innocents under your wing, for we are 'strangers, in a strange land.'"

"I am sorry to disappoint you," I return, calmly clipping my magazine leaves, "but I never *could* like Englishmen."

"You have no excuse;" he laughs.

"Ah, that makes a difference. I am partly Scotch, and love anything—*everything* pertaining to the dear old country—Scotch songs, Scotch legends, even Scotch dialect and Scotch plaids!"

"And may one hope you include Scotch *men?*" he inquires anxiously.

"How far are you going?" I hear Bess ask the other gentleman.

"I don't know," he returns. "We meet our yacht just here," indicating some spot on his rail-

road map, "and will cruise around the southern coast all winter."

"How lovely! So you meet your yacht at P——? Isn't that where we take the steamer, Nel?"

"Yes," I answer in a non-commital way, giving her a warning glance; for I do not care to discuss our affairs with perfect strangers.

On we go, passing little towns and orange groves, pine trees and saw palmetto. Now and then, a beautiful "bay-head" with large, moss-draped trees, greets our sight; and, as we proceed farther south, an occasional cluster of cabbage palms break the monotony.

Every thing is *oppressively* still—almost no sign of life, save at the little stations.

Surely we are going to the unlocated "jumping off place of creation." As we near our destination, the stranger nearest me remarks: "As we shall probably see more of each other, suppose we introduce ourselves." handing me his card.

"'Alan Douglas Kieth?'" I exclaim in surprise.

"From Aberdeen?"

"Yes. Permit me to introduce my friend: Kenneth Lindsey, Miss ——."

"Kieth," I return coldly. "My sister, Miss Bessie Kieth, Mr. Kieth; Mr. Lindsey."

"Can it be" exclaims Bess, "that we are cousins?"

"Let us hope so," returns Mr. Kieth with a smile.

"Ah here we are, at last," as the train stopped at the miserable apology for a depot.

"Can we assist you?"

"Thank you;" I reply freezingly "the conductor will assist us. Conductor," as that official passes, "You will help us off?"

"Certainly, ma'am," he answers politely, "certainly. I thought you were all one party," he gathers our numerous packages and escorts us to the only hotel in P——.

"Why were you so rude to those delightful Scotchmen?" asks Bess, as we wash our blackened faces.

"Why you little goose, do you not know that he is our mean Scotch cousin? He is *Alan Douglas Kieth* of Aberdeen."

"Oh, I had not thought of that! Well, they are awfully nice, and I am glad we did not discover the relationship sooner."

We enter the dining-room, and are shown to the same table at which are seated the now obnoxious Scotchmen. They look annoyed, though amused."

"We seem fated to meet," remarks my cousin, rising to withdraw. "But, as this is the only hotel ——"

"It is of no consequence." I interrupt coldly.

"Have I offended in any way?" he asks politely.

"*You* should be most likely to know," I answer more frigidly, becoming much absorbed in my supper.

"Really, Miss Kieth, it is unjust to condemn without a hearing."

"Unjust!" I cry indignantly. *You* call *me* unjust?"

"I fail to see the necessity for such sarcasm," he says, with much dignity.

"Then, drop the subject," I reply, "and oblige me by forgetting we ever met."

"When ladies command, there is but one course for gentlemen," he answers, quitting the room.

CHAPTER IV.

"There's nothing in a name."—*Shakespeare.*

EARLY next morning we are aroused with the information, "Your boat is nigh about ready ter start, ma'am."

"Very well;" I return as I spring from my bed. "we will breakfast on board. Return in ten minutes, for our baggage."

Dressing hurriedly, we pay our bill, then follow the porter to the end of a long wooden pier. He had just assisted us aboard of a beautiful little naphtha launch, when, to my disgust, Mr. Kieth appears, polite surprise, not unmixed with amusement, depicted on his handsome face.

"I've brought your ladies, at last, sir," says the obsequious servant.

"Is this the steamer for M———?" I ask, overpowered by a sickening certainty of our blunder.

"No, ma'am. There she lies," pointing to a small, ungraceful propeller, "Leaves at six o'clock."

"Then," I contiued indignantly, "you have blundered unpardonably! Convey our luggage aboard —we will breakfast at the hotel."

"I m sorry, Miss, I thought 'twas all one party. The name you know——"

"Go!" I exclaim, wrathfully.

"Believe me, Miss Kieth," begins my enemy, "I regret exceedingly ——"

"'Tis nothing," I interrupt, "I am justly provoked at losing my beauty sleep. Come Bess."

"But, having been roused at this ungodly hour, will you not share our breakfast? We are just crossing to the yacht."

"What a beauty!" exclaims Bess, gazing with admiration to where the graceful vessel lay anchored in deep water.

"Do say yes, Nel!"

"Eat my enemy's salt?" I cry.

"Your enemy?" he repeats, in seeming amaze. "You speak in parables. How, when, and where have I injured you?"

"Oh yes, we are very innocent, *too* innocent!" I reply scornfully, and placing my hand through Bessie's arm, walk her back to the hotel.

"By all that is mysterious!" I hear him mutter, "what can she mean?"

"You know, Nel," says Bess, "I cannot think him so mean. He does not look a bit stingy; now, does he?"

"No," I confess, grudgingly. "He really has a fine face."

"Then why not treat him decently? He might fall in love with one of us, and then we would get back the money."

"Do you think I could forgive that unmanly letter? No! if he begged me on his knees to accept half of the fortune I would spurn it!"

"Himself included?"

"*Certainly!*"

"You will never get a handsomer man," warningly.

"Wait," I laugh "till he makes the munificent offer. We probably, have seen the last of him."

We spend the day upon the "Okeechobee," and towards evening arrive at our destination. It is a straggling village of about fifty houses, charmingly situated on the river C———. The first person I notice upon the wharf, is a little blond man, whose long bushy, red beard, and loud, commanding voice are calculated to attract attention. "That," I remark to Bess, "is our Peter. I know his accent."

"Now for some fun," she laughs. On he jumps, true sailor fashion, and inquires loudly for "a young feller mit the name of Kiet?"

Stepping forward, closely followed by my laughing sister, I remark coolly: "I am Nelson Kieth. Are you Mr. Peter Schneider, trustee for M——?"

"I" with a proud toss of his head, "is *Captain* Peter Schneider. But you—I tought you was *mans!* Vell, vell, me glad; vomans, me like petter—mooch petter!" with a delighted smile.

"I was named for an uncle; I explain, "finding you really prefered a lady, I decided to come. If, however, I fail to conduct the school to your satisfaction, I will leave ——"

"No, you doand!" he exclaims. "Me like you mooch, already. You got pooty cheek—you do! Dis *my* town, dis *my* school—I haf vomans teacher if I vont him. Mans too mooch rough, he teach gearls nottings bout dress, en how make goot vomans bime by. Now, den, you see?"

"Yes." I answer, much amused. "Let me introduce my sister."

"Vot!" he cries, "Two vomans? Goot! Mans, ve got blenty; vomans, too little bit!"

"Well, Captain Schneider, have you secured us a good boarding place?"

"Vy, you see," looking puzzled, "me tought you

was mans, en would bach mit me, in my house. Boardin' house, we not got him—oh me got him! I tek you to Mees Keyson. Se do every tings for *me*. I petter varn you dough, bout Mees Keyson—se vot you call jalous. Se not like vomans talk too mooch to her mans. See?

"Thank you," I return as gravely as possible. "We shall be careful."

Most of the houses are small, rough buildings, surrounded by a luxurious tropical growth.

"Wight over dare," say the voluble Peter, "ish de school-house." We look, and behold a neatly painted two story building shaded by grand moss draped oaks.

"Why, Captain," I say in surprise, have I so many pupils?"

"Vell, not just yet; but de geographical sitivation ob de town is bound to increase de poperlation! Wid dis fine river communication, dis splendid splendid climate, and *my* boat to tek de passengers, dis place is boun' to be de greatest helt resort in de State."

The warmer he waxes, the louder and higher becomes his voice.

"So, 'twas your boat we came on?" asks Bess. "Are you her Captain?"

"Yes. I des lay off dis trip to fix de school house for Monday. No odder mans in de place"—proudly—"could put dot organ to pieces already."

"So you have an organ in school!" I cry delightedly.

"I mooch glad you blay. Music, I lofe him! he fill me oop so mooch dot I can eat nottings! He make me happy dill I hurt, an I gry blenty tears!"

"Do you play?" I ask, deeply interested.

"Zome times—ven I all lone by mine zelf. Neffer, I blay for no boddies——dare ish mine house," pointing to a neat three-roomed cottage, almost hidden by the large orange trees about it.

"We thought," says Bess, with a laugh, "that you were married and had a large family."

"No," he says, a look of sadness creeping over his jolly old face. "Vomans ish not for me. Me got little dog," stooping to caress the little black and tan that trotted affectionately by his side.

Finally, we reach a double pen log cabin, where Mrs. Keyson, a tall ungainly woman, after listening in stolid silence to the captain's request, "reckins" she can take us.

"Den," says Peter, "I vill be up after supper. "You kin stay ef you're a mind ter remarks our hostess indifferently. "I've a big pan of clabber fer supper."

Clabber was evidently an attraction, for the trustee resumed his seat.

We repair to the "gallery" and he entertains us with his funny talk about "my town, *my* boat, *my* school," etc. But he is well informed despite his peculiar pronunciation, and great admiration of the personal pronoun. How came he, I wonder, in this out of the way settlement, trying to civilize a lot of "crackers?"

He informs us that he had, ten years ago, homesteaded one hundred and sixty acres, the very land on which M——— now stands; laid out the "city," giving away every alternate lot to "increase de poperlation;" built the school-house, which was used also for church purposes; ran the only steamboat and owned the only store in the settlement.

"Vere ish de poys?" he asks as we begin supper.

"In the woods," answers Mrs. Keyson.

"In the woods?" asks Bess, bewildered.

"Yes, gathering cattle for shipment." She accents the last syllable.

"Have you much cattle? I didn't know this was a grazing country."

"Yes, there's right smart about here. Our stock is only sixty thousand, but old Jedge Simmons has a hundred an' fifty thousand."

Surely, I think, the owner of so much cattle can afford a better house than this.

"When," I ask, "will your husband return?"

"To-morrow, may be. The boys 'lowed they'd try the new teacher a while—but I don't know as they'll keer to go to you, bein' as you're a women.'

This is hardly encouraging, but I determine to be brave.

"Captain," I say, inspired with a happy thought, "have you ever studied English from text books?"

"No, your ladyship. I haf neffer got von goot teacher."

"Then," I beg, "let me teach you—perhaps the pupils will look with more respect on a woman that instructs their trustee."

"Vot schmart litle dings se ish!" he cries with a laugh. "Me neffer tinks of him. Alride, ve pegins mit Monday nights."

"Thank you so much."

"No, me tanks *you*," he returns gallantly.

The next afternoon, about two o'clock, we hear a loud popping of whips, and weird peculiar cries which Mrs. Keyson informs us in the "cow holler." She says if we remain on the "gallery," we'll see a "likely bunch of cattle pass."

We waited. I confess my first sight of Florida

cattle was disappointing. Compared with Western stock they are no larger than calves; but, remembering that "silence is golden," I hold my tongue.

A few minutes later three men and a boy strode through the kitchen door.

"Mrs. Keyson!" I call, "some one wishes to see you."

"It's only Pa an' the boys," she returns calmly, opening her door.

"Well, Pa," she remarks as she enters the dining room where the new comers sit around the empty table.

"Well Ma," he returns, without moving. Not the slightest caress or hand shake passes between them. Of course I should not have looked, but curiosity overcame manners.

"Ma," yells the boy, at the top of his voice, "for goodness sake hurry with the grub! We aint had a mouthful since daylight."

"Any news, Ma?" asks another.

"Nothin'," she replies, as she leisurely places the cold food before them, "'cept the teacher's come."

"Well I say it! When did he come? Is he old or young? Does he look cross?" are some of the questions that burst from them.

Truly, eavesdroppers never hear good of themselves; Ma utterly crushed me by replying scornfully, "She aint nuthin' but a girl—no bigger than Syd," pointing to the boy. "An' she's stayin' here fer the present, till the ole Captain can make some other ărrangement. She an' her sister air on the gallery. I'll call 'em in if you want to see her."

She starts after us, but "Pa" remarks that they had better "clean" themselves up a little before meeting strangers.

We beat a hasty retreat, so do not meet them till supper.

"Pa" is a fine looking man, with kind, intelligent grey eyes; his manners are almost courtly. Frank, the oldest son, greatly resembles him. George and Syd are more like their mother.

Evidently, "Pa" had married beneath him.

I discovered later, that Mr. Keyson had been State Senator, paid frequent visits to the outer world, and, after "de Captain," was the leading man of M——.

The boys had been sent to college, but "Ma" grieved so terribly after them, that they would not return, after the first term.

Pa took a number of papers and magazines, both Frank and himself keeping up with current events; but the other boys, though naturally bright, knew almost nothing but cattle.

CHAPTER V.

"The hand of Douglas is his own."—*Scott.*

MONDAY morning, much to my surprise, I find a number of grown boys in the schoolroom; for Captain Peter had reported that, finding me such a learned woman, even he should become my pupil. This kind deception had the desired effect, and my school was unusually large; so large, in fact, that Peter delights Bess by proposing that she become assistant, "mit de zalarits ob dwenty-vive tollars a mont."

Teaching, even under favorable circumstances, is not easy; but, when both pupils and parents are ignorant and uncouth, it becomes laborious.

The boys could see no impropriety in appearing in their shirt-sleeves, neither could I convince my girls that bare feet and untidy dresses were unladylike. At length, in desperation, I wrote a list of things to be avoided, and offered a prize for "genteel manners."

We had been with Mrs. Keyson two weeks, when the Captain asked if we should like to keep house. Mrs. Keyson positively refused to take us as boarders, and we could scarcely accept her hospitality all winter.

"I should be charmed," I return, "but where is the house and furniture? I have not seen even a room to let."

"You haf mine house," he returns with a broad smile.

"But I could not think of turning you out of house and home."

"Dot ish nottings. Ven I stay ofer, me sleep mit de store."

"But all of your things? What will become of them?"

"De pooks, de organ und de vurniture me lef mit you. Mine oder traps me stow away mit de schmoke-house. Coom, I lofe you mooch; you haf mine house."

"Oh, you dear, good man! How can I thank you?"

"It ish nottings," with a little shrug. "You happy, den I happy. See?"

So we were soon in possession of his cottage; Bess installed as cook, and de Captain our chief slave. The change was delightful, and our house soon became the *rendezvous* for all music lovers in the neighborhood. Old and young, rich and poor, married and single, "all sorts and conditions of men," invaded the house.

De Captain, who is absent three evenings of each week, joins us when in port.

I had never yet heard him perform, though I know, from his rapt expression when I play, that he is a thorough musician. One evening he is begged for music, but declines to play.

"You ask him, Miss Kieth," says Mr. Keyson, "I know he will oblige *you*."

"I do not understand you," I return coldly, "However, I can but fail."

Crossing the room, I say: "Captain will you play for me? I am so anxious to hear you. Come,

please." I must confess, he startled me. Springing up, he grasped my hand, crying excitedly, "Me blay for you? Yes, *me go to hell for you!*" then rushing to the organ, his fingers bring forth such deep, rolling thunders that we almost feel the house shake; by degrees they die away, giving place to a sad, pathetic wail, so exquisitely beautiful that it thrills my very soul. 'Twas so sad, so appealing, the tears *would* come; yet so wonderfully sweet I was almost sorry when he gave a brilliant triumphal finale.

"What is it?" I ask, I never heard it before.'

"Mine life," he answers; as, without a "good-night," he departs.

Time passes rapidly. Our school improves, our patrons admire us greatly, and the neighborhood regards us as queens.

My only distress is de Captain; he has fallen madly in love with my unworthy self, and makes no effort to conceal his infatuation. He tells me openly he "lofes" me, but asks only for friendship.

He is awfully good to us, and—what can I do? If he was not so childishly sensitive, so painfully jealous, it would be amusing.

Bess enjoys my discomfiture immensely, and declares it serves me right for cutting her out.

"Nothing happens save the unforeseen," and I endorse the proverb, when, towards the end of October, de Captain brings our obnoxious fellow travelers to visit us.

"Dey vos fom de Jupean nations," he explains, "und I pring him long to hear some little music. You don't gare? Eh?"

"Certainly not," I return, bowing coldly to my unwelcome guests.

"I am sorry, Miss Kieth," begins my foe, "I had no idea, upon my honor, that you were the angelic creature we were invited to see."

"Thank you. I have never laid claims to such perfection, and can readily understand your look of bewildered disappointment."

"Don't be rough on a fellow," he pleads. "Is my presence really disagreeable to you?"

"I am your hostess."

"Shall I go or stay?"

"As you like," indifferently.

"Oh, Mees Nelsonn, "calls our Peter, "I vos hongry for von leetle song—vill you me make happy?"

Inwardly blessing Peter for this timely interruption, I rise and cross the room.

"Dot young mans," he whispers, finding me a song, "you know him before—you lofe him?"

"No, I hate him!"

"You hate him? Goot," a ring of determination in his voice, "Me kill him for you."

"No, don't hurt him!" I cry in alarm. "I never saw him but once before—he is less than nothing to me."

"Den, how you hate him?" eying me suspiciously.

"Oh, I didn't mean—but listen, this is your favorite." And I throw my whole soul into the deep thrilling notes of "Love's Sorrow."

One piece follows another, but de Captain stands guard and monopolizes me the whole evening.

Bess holds a little court at the other end of the room, and I see the young Scotchman is quite devoted.

Mr. Kieth seats himself at the organ, plays a light

running accompaniment, and catching my eye, sings:

"How can you treat me so?
Lady fair! lady fair!
Do you think me still a foe?
Lady fair! lady fair!

To all others you are sweet,
Lady fair! lady fair!
But I am dust beneath your feet,
Lady fair! lady fair!

Do you think such treatment just?
Lady fair! lady fair!
Why turn, with such disgust?
Lady fair! lady fair!

Come, can we not be friends?
Lady fair! lady fair!
On you it all depends,
Lady fair! lady fair!"

His voice is a rich, deep barytone—wonderfully attractive. I listen in spite of myself. I know he sings to *me*, and resent the mean advantage he takes, though I listen with pleasure to his voice.

"Captain," I say, in an undertone, "say good-night, please. The others will follow you—I am so tired."

"Good-night," says my enemy, extending his hand.

"Good-night," I return, my own clasped behind me.

"May I come again?"

"My rooms are open to the public."

"Will *you* care to see me?"

"No," coldly.

"Then," in a hurt tone, "I shall not intrude."

"As you like," I return calmly.

Bess grumbled greatly at my "unchristian conduct."

"They are so handsome," she exclaimed, "and

have such a lovely yacht, and Mr. Lindsey said they'd be just charmed to take us on a cruise down the coast—but of course you won't go. I think it's just *hateful* of you Nel!"

"I thought you had more spirit. Accept their hospitality, indeed!"

"Spirit or no spirit," she says with a regretful sigh, "'twould be lots of fun."

But "pride goeth before a fall," and the very next day, I was compelled to accept assistance from my hated foe.

I had noticed a cluster of orange blossoms near the top of a large tree in the back yard; and knowing that seeing it only, could convince Uncle of this freak of nature, determined to mail it that night.

Bess holds the ladder, while I, scissors in hand, mount to the tree top. Slowly and painfully I make my way; at last, torn and bleeding I secure the prize, then begin the descent. Imagine my horror to find both Bessie and ladder gone!

Loud and long I call, but all in vain.

At last, the situation becomes monotonous, and raising my voice, which is by no means weak, I scream:

"Help! Help!" A man is passing, whistling merrily. I give another wild yell. He leaps the fence and looks around. Yell number three brings him to my novel prison.

"How can I assist you?" he asks politely.

I peep through the leaves; how disgusting! It is my horrid Scotch cousin.

"By helping me down, of course!" I exclaim ungraciously. "There's a ladder somewhere—Bess knows where it is."

He searches diligently, but can find neither. 'Twas

unkind of Bess to treat me so; and so mortifying to be dependent on that man.

"I am afraid you will have to jump," he says.

Making the best of circumstances, I throw my basket and scissors to the ground, gather my skirts close, and take a flying leap straight into the arms of the enemy,

"How romantic!" laughs my naughty sister, mischievously regarding us from the kitchen door. "My happy thought has produced a charming tableau.

"Practical jokes," I cry, regaining my feet, "are detestable!"

"Now do not be cross, sister mine, but invite your noble preserver to supper; it is just ready."

"Will you?" I ask politely.

"I will excuse your doing penance," he replies, leaping the fence.

CHAPTER VI.

"Bachelors are providential beings; God created them for the consolation of widows and the hope of maids."—*De Finod.*

"BUT what about school?"

"De school, he gan vait," returns our trustee decidedly.

"Won't the patrons object?" I ask with hesitation.

De Captain actually grows purple with rage; his whole body swells with pride as he replies: "De padrons ish nottings. Dot ish *my* school—I do vot I please mit de school! *I* say he close mit Vinsday, for tank-giffin day, und not open no more till de nex' Monday. Dare now, you satisfy?"

"Yes, if you are sure it is all right."

"Den you mit me vill go?"

"With pleasure. Who comprises the party?"

"Vell, you see," counting on his fingers, "dare ish de two Jupean fellers, und you two gearls, und de Keyson poys, und Mees Marta Clarke, und de Lang gearls. Ish dere enny pody else you vonts?"

"No; but you have no chaperon."

"Chopperont? Vot ish he?"

"A married lady, to keep us in order, you know."

"Dot ish no goot! Olt vomans rada stay home.

Ve not do nottings bad; vy must we be votched? Eh?"

"Is it not customary down here?"

"No inteet! dey vill dinks you crazy to dake olt marrit vomans."

"Very well," I return, only half satisfied, "but I wish you could persuade Mrs. Keyson to join us."

"Se shall, if *you* vornt him. Me go wight now und see him."

The excursion we have been discussing is to the phosphate works, and some of the lovely islands down the coast.

The Captain has made up this party solely for my enjoyment, and I appreciate his kindness; but—those Scotchmen! I seem to meet them every where. How I wish they would leave. Only think of pic-nicing three days with them; really, it is too vexatious! In spite of all my lectures, Bess *will* flirt with Kenneth Lindsey. I can hardly blame her, for he is so polished and gentlemanly, so different from these rough cowboys—but then, I am sure there is some understanding between young King and herself. She should not receive long love-letters from one man, and openly encourage another. Kenneth is a bonny lad; I like him notwithstanding his warm friendship for my enemy, and would be sorry for him to come to grief.

Ah, there they come now; he carrying her basket of ferns, their hats and clothing profusely decorated with wild-flowers.

"May I come in, Miss Kieth?" he calls, as they reach the gate. "I have something for you."

"What is it?" I ask.

"A *billet doux*, I suppose," handing me a note.

"Very likely," I return, opening it.

"MISS KIETH:

Our nautical friend has invited me to attend your Thanksgiving excursion. Now, tell me plainly, will my presence be distasteful? Can invent some excuse, if necessary. Yours truly,

ALAN D. KIETH."

"Tell him——" I begin.

"Do you wish me to be utterly demolished?" cries Kenneth in terror.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, 'Lady fair,' if I return without some missive, penned by thy dear hand, he'll fall upon me, tooth and nail, and I greatly doubt any remains being left for Christian burial."

"Here,' says Bess, tossing me a magnolia *grandeflora*, "answer on this."

Breaking off a petal, I trace with a pin, "Go, if you like." For, of course, I must not be out done in generosity.

"Thanks, awfully," says Kenneth. "My noble friend has something on his mind. I hope this will prove a nervine."

"Let us hope so," laughs Bess. "Miss Kieth," continues Kenneth, "I would give a great deal to know why you hate poor Alan. Why, he is the best fellow in the world. I have known him since we were children, and" enthusiastically, "would stake my honor on his character! He could not do a *little* thing, and he is generous to a fault——"

"Generous?" I repeat scornfully. "We must agree to differ."

"That is because you do not know him; have never seen him rise superior to trial and temptation. Oh you would love him——"

"'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished," quotes Bess with a wicked laugh.

"Really, Miss Kieth," continues Kenneth, eloquent in his friend's service, "it hurts him to be treated so unmercifully. What *has* he done?"

"Mr. Kieth can explain more satisfactorily."

"He says not."

"Nonsense! Suppose we discuss another topic. Have you caught many fish to-day?"

"Yes; 200 lbs. in two hours."

"Ah! Jack fish, I suppose."

"Yes; do you like them?"

"They are too coarse." says Bess.

"You prefer small fry?"

"Yes, indeed; they are much sweeter."

"Yes," with an admiring glance at her own small person.

"Little things usually are."

"That depends," she returns wisely. "Mosquitoes and sand-flies are both *very small*—do you find them sweet?"

"They certainly give us a *warmer* reception than you do," reproachfully.

"Never, before, have I been advised to imitate the mosquito!" cries my indignant sister. "We have been admonished all our lives to go to the ant for wisdom, but to learn hospitality from a mosquito, is too—*biting* a sarcasm!"

"Oh, now, Miss Bessie, that's too hard," he laughs.

"I thought you wanted—why here comes our Peter, puffing and blowing like his own little steamboat. "What's up now?"

He is certainly making port under full sail. The dear fellow has walked so rapidly that his naturally

fair complexion is quite as fiery as his beard. Every pore is dripping with perspiration, but a smile of triumph illumines his glowing face, as, waving his little cane frantically in the air, he calls joyfully, "Me got her; se alride!"

"Hath much learning made him mad?" questions Bess.

"At any rate," says Kenneth, "there's method in his madness; don't you see he addresses Miss Kieth? Now, as ever, his eye seeks her's alone. She, seemingly, comprehends his ravings. Mark the mathematical precision with which he ignores our august presence! Is it not galling to our sensitive pride? Come, let us fly from his awful presence!"

"No thank you, I am anxious to learn whom he has got, and what he is to do with her."

"Well, Captain," I ask, "did she consent?"

"Yas, se alride—den ve vill start to-morrow mornint, early mit de day—boud zix o'clock?"

"Very well. Now, how about our baskets——"

"Dot ish nottings. I haf cook; he do effery dings ve vant. Effry feller dake his own bar; me look after de rest."

"You are ever so good, Captain, I know we'll have a jolly time."

"Dot ish goot! You gay und happy, den I sholly mooch; you sadt und lonesom, den I haf mooch bad veelins—me gry mine eyes sdraight avay oudt already."

CHAPTER VII.

"Men say of women what pleases them ; women *do* with men what pleases *them*."—*De Segur.*

SO we start on our "pleasure excursion."

I had long been anxious to visit the phosphate works, for I had not only seen the tremendous bones, ribs, and teeth from these prolific beds, but the Captain and I had been investigating them both geologically and chemically.

We are a merry crowd, if I except Mrs. Keyson, who, during my whole acquaintance, has never thawed. She is an odd woman. I know she loves her husband and boys, though she never shows the least sign of affection for any one—is utterly, hopelessly indifferent till roused by jealousy.

Her husband, on the contrary, is quite a delightful companion, while the boys are talk-to-able.

Miss Clarke is a simpering maiden of thirty-five summers; and the Lang girls, gushing misses of sixteen and eighteen. They regard every man who owns a mustache as their lawful prey, and look with lofty scorn upon the younger Keysons who can not boast that proud distinction. Needless to say, the boys return their feelings with interest and lavish their youthful affections on Bess and me. They are perfectly happy with either of us, having no decided preference. Their chief delight is in hanging round us, like two great watch dogs, "to

keep the other fellows from making love, you know." This laudable propensity having stood us in good stead on more than one occasion, we naturally encourage its continuance.

What a perfect day for pic-nicing! The sky bright and clear, with masses of soft, filmy white clouds; the brilliant sunshine, dancing gaily over the "dark, deep, beautiful blue" waters; the fresh, bracing breeze, and no prospect of rain—what more could heart wish for?

"Coom oop to de bilot house," says de Captain, "dere you see mooch petter."

I am surprised, and rather disconcerted to find my enemy at the wheel.

He is looking abominably handsome in his dark blue yachting suit, and smiles with pleasure, as we enter.

"Good morning, Miss Kieth," he says, "Let me thank you for your kind note."

"You need not," I return ungraciously, "I could scarcely have written otherwise." And, ignoring his look of disappointment, I turn and ask Peter what point we are passing.

"Oh dot vas Point H———, vere Captain H——— shwum de river when de Injunts vos afder him right avay, quick, in von hurry! Dot vot happen blenty yeârs ago—long dimes pefore you vos borned."

"Do you know," I reply, "I have never seen an Indian?"

"Oh, vell, he coom in bime-by mit vennyson und vild durkey,"

"How far do they live from M———?"

"'Bout fifty mile. Me get oop nice growd, und dake you oudt to see de camp."

"Oh that would be lovely. When can we go?"

"Vot de matter mit Quistmas veek—eh?"

"Why, that will suit splendidly. Captain, you are a jewel!" He laughs delightedly, for our Peter is vain and loves compliments.

"Me forgodt;" he says, a few minutes later, "ve ish all invite to a tinner barty. Here he ish"—thrusting his hand in one of his many pockets, he draws out a note, and hands it to me, saying, "you read him."

"DEAR CAPTAIN:

Remembering that Thursday is your birthday, I have prepared a feast, and shall be pleased to receive any number of friends you care to bring. Dinner at six, sharp. As ever, your friend,

Nov. 26, 18—. LILLIAN LEFON."

"Who is Lillian Lefon, and where does she live?" I ask, much interested.

"Oh, se ish vidow womans, und se life bout turty miles fum here; ve mooch goot vriens—I eat dinner mit her effry birtday."

"How nice! Is she old or young?"

"Young."

"And pretty?"

"Oh yas—und reech."

"And you like her very much?"

"Yas—pooty goot."

"Then," asks Kieth, "why do you not marry her?"

Peter blushes, and looks much confused.

"Why Captain," I tease, "are you really in love?"

"Me lofe none but you!" he cries ardently.

Kieth laughs, wickedly, enjoying my discomfiture. I favor him with one withering glance, then turn my back, and ask the Captain a leading ques-

tion on politics. This, I know, is a safe topic; for nothing delights him more than lengthy discourses on "de political sitivation ob de country, de intrancient (intrinsic) value ob free trade, and de tormenjus (tremendous) de-ficulties" that would befall our nation, if prohibition was enforced.

We soon reach the phosphate works, and board one of the dredges engaged in scooping this valuable deposit from the river bottom. A heavy lighter is being towed down stream. Another, equally large, lies along side of the dredge to receive the screened phosphate, which flows continually down the shoot. Several men, provided with shovels and spades, assist the transit. The deposit is largely pebble, but even in the short while we watch the flow, tremendous bones of long extinct animals are brought to the surface. We climb to the upper deck, and inspect the large circular screen, which, by every revolution separates so much sand from the more valuable phosphate; and are shown the pipe through which the deposit enters the screen, the great screw and its process of cleaning; then its final transfer to the ever-waiting lighter.

Mr. Kieth suggests, that, instead, of returning by the ladder, which he considers unsafe, I jump to the large pile of phosphate heaped upon the lighter. From sheer perversity, I refuse. De Captain holds the ladder, and my enemy offers his hand, which I decline.

When half way down, the dredge gives a sudden swing, the ladder is unsettled, and down I come, straight into the arms of the enemy!

"Mine Got!" cries Peter, his ruddy face white with fright. "You would haf cronched to det! Des see—de lighter und de dredge boat schwing to already de same meenit."

Keith, who looks quite as agitated as de Captain, has utterly forgotten that he holds me in a warm embrace. I mildly suggest that we are attracting attention. Slowly depositing me, he eyes me attentively, evidently expecting another mishap.

We go ashore, where there is a tremendous pile of phosphate, look for shark's teeth, watch the process of burning (to reduce the shell) visit the drying sheds, and finally select a nice place, make coffee, and spread our lunch.

Peter insists on doing everything in person, but Miss Clarke will assist. She is painfully attentive to the poor fellow, exclaiming constantly, "Oh you kind, *good* man!" or "Dear Captain,—you delightful creature!" which, mingled with curious contortions of face and body, rolling of eyes and theatrical gestures, are simply killing.

"Captain," I ask, "did you make this chowder? It is delicious!"

"Yas, me mek him. You like him? Goot! Haf som moor?"

"I didn't know clams *could* be cooked tender. How did you manage it?"

"Me show you som day," he returns much flattered.

Bess and Kenneth are eating from the same plate, their heads almost too close together.

"Des look at dem!" laughs Peter, "Dey haffin sholly ole dimes."

George Keyson sits near them, so I feel safe.

Frank is devoting himself to the eldest Miss Lang, and the younger, because she has no other game, tries to flirt with Syd.

Mrs. Keyson and Miss Clarke discuss with great zeal, the relative merits of canned guavas and Mango

jelly, while Mr. Keyson politely supplies their wants.

Mr. Kieth, my nearest neighbor, is polite, but not obstrusive. Our remarks are far from brilliant. I strive to make the conversation general, but fail; so, with one despairing glance at Peter, who is here, there, and every where, I meekly resign myself to the inevitable.

"Do you not think" he remarks, *apropos* of nothing, "that it would be much more pleasant to lay aside your enmity? Why can we not enjoy ourselves as much as they?" glancing towards Bess and Kenneth.

"Well," I return, grateful for his timely rescue, "As we shall, necessarily, be much together, I will try to overlook your past unkindness."

"Come, now, in the name of Christian charity, what *have* I done?"

I look him calmly in the face, but discover no sign of guilt; his self-control is truly wonderful.

"Really," I reply, "if we discuss that topic even surface friendship will become impossible; so, I will pretend (for the trip only) that we are devoted friends."

"Thank you," he returns with a bright smile, "Friends shake hands; shall we seal the compact?"

"Mine are greasy," trying to avoid him.

"That is easily overcome," he answers, producing a snowy handkerchief.

Completely cornered I yield gracefully. His clasp is strong, sincere, magnetic; I feel *compelled* to like him, though I can never forgive his ungentlemanly letter.

I must confess he is a delightful companion, and I give myself up to the full enjoyment of this charming trip, remembering always, that next week he will still be my foe.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Samivel, my son, bevare of the vidows."—*Dickens.*

THE river, near its mouth, widens into a broad bay, and is dotted here and there with lovely verdure-clothed islands. On one of these, lives Mrs. Lefon; and his majesty, the sun, is just taking his evening dip into the blue waters, as we reach her wharf.

There she stands, in her white dress, a smile of welcome upon her lips.

The Captain leaps ashore, shakes hands, and says something, at which they both laugh. She has fine teeth, and evidently knows it.

Alan Kieth takes possession of my wrap, and stands, patiently waiting my departure.

Seeing he must be my attendant, I hastily join de Captain, and am introduced to our hostess.

She is a slender blond, "divinely tall, and most divinely fair," with engaging manners, and a pair of dangerous blue eyes.

She smiles serenely upon us, saying how "perfectly lovely" it is to have us; then, slipping her hand under Peter's arm, leads the way to the house.

"She seems to regard de Captain as her rightful prey," laughs Kieth, as we follow them up the white shell walk. "Rather hard on you, is it not?"

"Yes, indeed." I return much aggrieved. "I feel that I am defrauded!"

"Poor little girl! I wish I could console you."

"You cannot. No one can talk like Peter."

"I can at least say, 'I lofe you!'"

"You shall not mock the dear fellow!" said I, while blushing at his look.

"I am simply imitating his virtues," he returns coolly.

"Look, Miss Nel!" cries Syd running towards us. "I've found a lot of cocoa-plums; try one."

I force myself to eat one or two, though I do not like them, and am rewarded by Syd's company the rest of the way.

The house, a neat, white cottage, stands on a slight elevation, the grounds being terraced down to the white sands of the shell strewn beach. On each side of the avenue, stately cocoa-palms rear their lofty heads, and the wind, playing through their graceful fronds, creates a wierd, peculiar sound, unlike any thing I had ever heard. Brilliant flowers are growing every where—the air is heavy with perfume.

I am not surprised, when a little South American monkey climbs rapidly to the top of a cocoa-nut tree, or startled when a gorgeous parrot screams shrilly, "wipe your feet! wipe your feet, I say!" for they are only in keeping with their surroundings.

"You may take the gentlemen to your old room, Captain," says Mrs. Lefon. "Dinner will be served in ten minutes. This way, ladies." She conducts us to a daintily appointed bed-room, where we do a little extra touching up.

"You must excuse our dinner dresses," I say. "The Captain told us nothing of your invitation till we were on board."

"Just like the dear fellow!" she laughs. "By the way, I have arranged for tableaux, and invited the islanders; you will all assist."

"Then I hope," says Bess, brushing out her pretty blond hair, and fluffing her bangs, "you can clothe us."

"Yes," returns the widow, "I have not only arranged my program, but all costumes and stage property. The Captain delights in theatricals, and —can any of you sing?"

"Miss Kieth has a lovely voice," returns Miss Clarke. "I have a throat trouble and never sing, now."

"She never could," snickers the younger Miss Lang.

"Ah how lovely!" says Mrs. Lefon, "and your brother—or is he your cousin—does he sing?"

"Yes."

"Then you two will do that lovely duet from *Faust*. Of course you know it?"

—"Yes; but please do not put me with him. I will do anything else."

"Nonsense! You *must*. Are you ready? Then come to the parlor."

As the gentlemen enter our hostess pairs us off; then to the great disgust of both Miss Clark and myself she leads the way to the dining-room, her fair face flushed with pleasure as she leans complacently on Peter's arm.

"Left again!" laughs Kieth, thoroughly enjoying my crestfallen look.

"What does she mean?" I ask, placing my finger tips relunctantly upon his arm.

"By what?"

"By walking rough-shod over my feelings," I return with a pathetic sigh.

"It is hard," he returns, "to lose such a devoted slave."

The dining-room is a large airy apartment, finished in natural pine. The door and window trimmings of black walnut form a pretty contrast, while the floor, stained a dark brown, is only partly concealed by a handsome crumb cloth.

A scarlet flamingo stands erect in one corner, looking disdainfully upon the smaller birds, who, from the other end of the room perch upon the moss-draped branches of an old tree.

An eight foot tarpon, mounted on blue velvet, occupies a conspicuous place; while, over the door, are draped the German flag with our own stars and stripes. Just beneath these national decorations, hangs a floral horse shoe, while from walls and ceiling depend numerous garlands, and wreathes.

The table is an artistic study in fruit and flowers.

Dainty cactus blossoms, pale yellow, mingled with geranium leaves and waxy pau-pau flowers, are beautifully arranged in exquisitely tinted sea shells; while great pyramids of tropical fruits, piled high in silver-mounted turtle backs, lend a quaint charm to the feast.

On each plate lies a beautifully painted tarpon scale—the reverse side containing the *menu*. We are favored, also, with unique *bon-bon* boxes—highly polished bivalves, tied with dainty ribbons. The butter plates are fragile white shells, with an inner coating of rich yellow—the soup-ladle, sugar-tongs and berry spoons, all shells, fitted with silver handles.

There we sat, miles from civilization, and ate a nine course dinner—beautifully served; artistic, and decidedly novel.

The meal over, we adjourn to the parlor and hold a council of war.

Our hostess informs us that the theatricals will take place upon a large shell bank near the house—the bank being our stage, the audience sitting below. The company, she says, is waiting; so, taking her program, she writes our names opposite certain tableaux, and, without giving us the slightest idea of our parts, leads us to the open air theatre.

A palmetto house, separated by curtains into three apartments, furnishes excellent dressing rooms. In the middle room stands Mrs. Lefon, calm and collected, distributing costumes; she tell us to give no thought to our performance, *she* will pose us properly; and bids us hasten to clothe ourselves, for the bonfires have been lighted, and the curtain is about to rise.

We obey with alacrity, for who can resist this quiet, self-contained young widow?

CHAPTER IX.

"Love is—I know not what; which comes—I know not whence; is formed—I know not how; which ends—I know not when or why."—*Mlle. C. Scudderi.*

THE Captain opens our performance with a plaintive flute solo, which is followed by an exciting sword duel, between our Scotchmen—attired respectively as highlander and lowlander.

The curtain next rises on the sad faces of Frank Keyson and Mrs Lefon—both wearing the French costume of two centuries ago. "The Huguenot," whispers Kieth, even before she begins her passionate recital.

Her long fair hair hangs loosely about her shoulders, her eyes look tenderly, beseechingly into his dark face as she pleads for his safety. All through this scene Peter plays "*Consolation*" so softly it seems miles and miles away—yet, so distinctly that we hear every note. Now come some comic tableaux, in which the Misses Lang and Messrs. Keyson figure. Bess makes a charming "Priscilla;" and, with Kenneth for "John Alden" gives us a perfect "Spinning-wheel" scene.

Last of all, comes our duet.

Both my enemy and myself are lifted entirely out of ourselves, and act as though we mean every word. We do, for the time, or how else could we sing?

"You are excited," he says, as the curtain falls

amid great applause. "Come, take a turn on the beach."

Forgetful of my enmity, I follow him willingly, and am soon walking close to the water's edge Now I listen to the wild sea waves, and am thrilled by that glorious song of nature alway the same, yet ever new!

The fresh sea breeze, the clear, bright moonlight, the deep, majestic voice of old ocean, above all, the sympathetic silence of my companion, charm me unutterably!

"Miss Nel! Oh Miss Nel!" screams Syd's young voice.

"Ah!" I sigh, "Why will they worry me?"

"I will send him about his business," says Mr. Kieth by no means gently.

"No," I return regretfully, "the charm is broken; let us return."

"Stay a little," he pleads, "I could linger for hours."

"So could I, till Syd interrupted us."

"Were you really happy—with me?"

"Perfectly."

"Then stay, and let me tell you——"

"I say, Miss Nel, they are waiting for you!" Syd's voice is much nearer, and soon he joins us, saying in an annoyed tone, "What in the mischief are you doing way out here? I have looked high and low for you; been at it an hour!"

"Dear child!" I return, "we have not been here ten minutes! What do they want?"

"Why they want to cut the birthday cake—it has a ring and a button in it—and the Cap'n won't let 'em touch it till you get there."

"I wonder Mrs. Lefon allows him to think of me!"

"I say it!" exclaims my youthful admirer, "how can she help it? But I tell you, Miss Nel, she does him that way all the time they are together—never lets him look at another woman."

"What does she mean?"

"I don't know, but it looks plaguey like she means to marry him."

Mr. Keith and I both laugh.

"Oh, Syd," I cry, "you are too comical! The very idea is preposterous—our Peter is not a marrying man."

"Well," he continues doggedly, "I didn't say *he* wanted *her*–did I? Next year is leap year, you know."

"And do you fancy, you ridiculous boy, that she will ask *him?*"

"Of course. Why, I bet you anything, if you go back on him, she'll marry him in spite of anything he may do or say!"

"I must confess," laughs Kieth, "I should greatly like to hear the courtship."

"I say, Miss Nel," persists Syd, "could you love a fellow well enough to tell him of it?"

"I think not, Syd."

"Not even leap year? Just for fun, you know."

"Perhaps—but I could never do it in earnest."

"Well," continues the youngster, as we join the waiting crowd, "it can't be any harder on you than on us men."

"*Us men?*" mocks Bess. "Syd, my child, what are you puzzling your poor brains over?"

"We are discussing," retorts the boy, drawing himself up proudly, and using the longest words at his command, "the advisability of you ladies proposing marriage. What are your sentiments, Mrs. Lefon?"

Our hostess gives one calm, possessive glance at Peter, then, in her sweet, deliberate voice replies:

"I think it but just that woman exercise that right in common with man.'

"Oh!" exclaims Miss Clarke, "I could never be so immodest."

"There is no immodesty," returns the fair Lillian. "When we love, eyes, voice, manner, all plead for us. Why not words? Only a foolish prejudice prevents our speaking."

"Could you?" I hear Kenneth ask Bess.

"If the inducement was sufficient," she laughs.

"What think you of an heir-loom diamond? Would it be——?"

"It *might*, if handsome."

"Bess," I call, determined to break into this dangerous conversation, "do help me find this pin—it's sticking me awfully."

"Nel," she whispers," you are too mean—you spoilt just the loveliest flirtation!"

"I know it," sternly. "Why will you carry on so outrageously?"

"I'm only having a little fun," she returns innocently. "It don't hurt them! Their hearts are like turtle eggs—you may make a little dent, but they are too tough to break."

"I'm ashamed of you! Do try to behave more decently."

"Well," that's a good one!" she laughs. "Pray, Miss Propriety, what have you been doing to our enemy? *You* need'nt accuse *me* of flirting!"

"What do you mean?" I ask indignantly.

"What do I mean? Why, that you have been inseparable since lunch. Kenneth and I have been wondering all sorts of things."

The more annoyed I become, the worse she teases, so I change my tactics and remark quietly, "Yes, he is very agreeable."

The motley assembly of islanders is served with ice-cream and cake, fruit and nuts; and we gather around the birthday cake. The Captain, who cuts first, gives a war-whoop; for out falls a dainty forget-me-not ring! Much amusement is caused by our efforts to avoid the dreaded button; fate, alas! gives it to Miss Clarke—and she accepts it ungraciously.

"Dere, Mees Nelsonn," says Peter, "you kep my little trinket dill ve gets home; I vill sure loose him."

"Very well," I reply, extending my hand.

He playfully drops the ring over my finger, and I push it down, considering that the most convenient mode of carriage.

"Just look at her!" whispers Syd, and I glance up in time to catch the look of surprise and hatred with which the widow favors me.

"Why Syd, what ails her?"

"Jealousy," he answers sagely. "That's just the way they look when they fancy another girl is after their fellow. She'll hate you, now, worse than snakes! Just look at 'em—guess she's hauling him over the coals."

They are evidently arguing some point, but I can see she is tranquilly taking her own way. There is so much quiet force about this woman, that I begin to sympathize with Peter. What if Syd's absurd idea is correct? Now they approach us, and she remarks in her smooth, even voice, "I have at last convinced the Captain that I can take care of you to-night—that is, if you won't mind being a little crowded."

"Thank you," I return, by no means charmed. "It is unnecessary to trouble you—we came prepared to camp."

"Indeed, you shall not!" she returns decisively, "Your beds are already spread—so come with me—it is after twelve. Captain, you know where to stow the gentlemen—come, ladies."

Mrs. Lefon's bedroom had been transformed into a regular dormitory—neat little cots occupied every available space. She gives up her own comfortable bed to the two older ladies, and takes possession of the fifth cot.

"Girls," she says, mischievously, "be sure to name the corners; and remember, what you dream will come to pass."

'Tis the first peep of day, when I awake from a most horrible dream! Will it come true? I hope not! Mrs. Lefon, our polite hostess, had chased me all night with a long, murderous knife, shrieking wildly that I had stolen her lover, and should die! Down the slippery beach we flew, her long, fair hair flying wildly in the breeze! I feel her hot breath in my face—now she clutches me, and is about to finish her mad exploit, when Peter and my enemy rush to the rescue. The former shields me with his body, while the latter grabs her floating hair, holding her in a vice. I start up and look around—thank God, it is but a dream! My companions sleep peacefully. Miss Clark snores musically, and Mrs. Lefon's face is as composed as in her waking hours.

I return to my couch, but can not sleep—so hastily dressing, I slip quietly from the house down to the beach.

Our two Scotchmen have just emerged from their

morning dip. The Captain, coming on deck, calls out "De coffee ish ready!"

Ah, now he sees me, jumps ashore to ask if I'll join them. I accept thankfully, having no romantic notion for long walks before breakfast.

Peter, now free from Mrs. Lefon's clutches, seems to enjoy himself immensely.

"How came you up so early?" asks Kenneth, "I thought you loved your beauty sleep."

"Bad dreams," I answer shortly.

"Why, you are as bad as Kieth—he clutched me about day-break, and yelled aloud, "Hold, wretched woman!" Suppose you give us an experience meeting."

"What did you dream?" I ask, looking curiously into my enemy's troubled face.

"That the Captain and I were rescuing you from a mad woman."

"How strange! Did you see her face?"

"Yes, and it was——"

The Captain is looking at us anxiously, so he continues evasively, "a tall woman, with long, fair hair. She carried a long knife, and threatened to kill you, saying you had stolen her lover, and should 'die! die! die!' Is she the same?"

"Yes," I answer, much agitated.

"Come, boys," he says, laying aside his cup, "let us walk on the beach—nothing like a good run to brace up nerves."

We wander several hours, stopping occasionally to pick up a pretty shell, star-fish or bit of coral.

The Captain is as merry as a boy; indeed, we are all happy children.

"Suppose," suggests Kieth, "we run away, and

leave the others? We are much happier without them."

"You forget," says Kenneth, evidently thinking of Bess, "we would soon quarrel over our lady. No, our colony would necessarily demand another."

"I see your game," laughs his friend, "you would provide for self, and leave the Captain and me to contend for the smiles of our present sovereign."

"And the Captain," I say with a mischievous laugh, "could never leave Mrs. Lefon."

Poor Peter blushes hotly, as he exclaims, "You know nottings bout him! Se bodder me too mooch already. But vot I do? Se fine vomans—vere fine vomans—but I lofe but you!"

"But you must not love me," I insist, "she does not like it."

"Me done gare—me done gare! Se ish nottings. I lofe you mooch!"

"I begin to doubt it; for you have neglected me shamefully!'

"Oh Mees Nelson! you know he vos true! Here, on my knees I schware him." Down upon the wet sand he falls, regardless of spectators.

"Oh you ridiculous man! Do get up. Hurry, or that great wave will strike you!"

"Neffar!" he cries steadfastly. "Till you say dot you believe me."

"You had better, for here comes Mrs. Lefon."

This information acts like magic. Up he bounces, a look of disgust upon his dear old face.

Bessie and the widow soon join us; if looks could kill I should certainly drop dead in my tracks. "Breakfast is waiting," she remarks in her composed way, "we have had a long search for you. Come, Captain."

Peter is in a quandary. He looks longingly at me and hesitates.

"Please, Mrs. Lefon," I cry with much feeling, "do not take the Captain from me! He is just in the midst of a thrilling description. Mr. Kieth, I know, will be charmed to escort you."

"I regret disturbing you," she returns politely, "but I am compelled to discuss an important business matter with the Captain."

She lays her firm white hand upon his unwilling arm, and, with one triumphant glance at me, tows the poor fellow forward.

"Did you ever get left?" laughs Kenneth, who has already taken possession of Bess.

"Surely, Mr. Kieth, you sympathize with me?" I retort in mock despair.

"How can I," he laughs, "when you were so willing to sacrifice me?"

"But you are not so charmingly unique as Peter!"

"Serves you right," says Bess, "for being selfish. Poor Miss Clarke hasn't had a peck at him yet."

"Seriously, Miss Kieth," says my enemy, "don't rouse that woman's jealousy—there is a devil behind those tranquil eyes; she'll go to any lengths."

"And must I tamely surrender my most devoted admirer?"

"'Twould be safer—unless, indeed, you care for Peter."

"Of course I care for Peter; how can I help it, when he says 'I lofe you?'"

"Then be on guard, keep your out-posts protected and look out for treachery."

CHAPTER X.

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body nature is, and God the soul."—*Pope.*

AFTER a dainty breakfast, we bid our hostess farewell, board the "Okeechobee," and steam further south.

On we glide, over the smooth waters; passing many curious mangrove swamps, and beautiful beach-encircled islands.

Immense flocks of sea-gulls scream by us in their flight; while, just ahead, a pelican dives for his prey, then calmly rides the shining waters.

Islands become more numerous. Now we reach a cluster, separated only by narrow passses. The islands are in a high state of cultivation; cocoanut groves edge the beaches, extending some distance inland, there to overshadow bananas, pineapples, and smaller fruits.

The inhabitants, Peter informs me, engage in raising vegetables for northern markets; thousands of crates being shipped every year.

Here, frost is unknown; for the warm gulf waters, even more than the southern latitudes, produce an even, mild temperature, seldom found out of the tropics.

This, I am told, is the beginning of the wonderful Thousand Islands; for, as we proceed south, the isles become more and more numerous, the passes more narrow and intricate.

Towards evening we land on one of these gems of ocean and prepare to camp.

De Captain flourishes about, giving orders to the others; nothing delights his dear old heart more than "bossing."

Our bars are stretched, a huge camp-fire lighted, and Peter, assisted—or hindered—by most of the fair ones, prepares supper.

"Who will wash dishes?" asks Bess, when we've all done justice to our open air feast.

"I!" exclaim the Misses Lang, simultaneously.

"I will assist some gentleman," simpers Miss Clarke.

"Suppose we draw straws?" continues Bess. "You hold them for us, Mrs. Keyson, and your husband for the boys; remember the shortest straw means dishwashing."

The penance falls on Mr. Keith and me. How disagreeable! The others give a shout of derision, well knowing my aversion to this particular occupation. Now, I *can* wash dishes, and wash them well, but I utterly detest it! A cook is something of a general, but a dishwasher—I fully agree with the sensible woman who wrote,

"Oh the times they must be handled,
O'er and o'er, day after day,
Almost makes me wish the china
Were in bits, for children's play!"

However, with all my faults I possess one virtue—that of accepting the inevitable with equanimity. So, with my sweetest smile, I exclaim gaily, "Come, Mr. Kieth, begin your work!"

"Must I?" he asks in lazy tones. "Suppose we bribe the cook?"

"Never!" I return sternly. "Here, scrape these plates, while I pack the cold food."

"What must be done?"—he begins, scraping with great vigor.

He "stacks" the dishes, pours hot water over them, then stands, towel in hand to dry them. We soon finish our unwelcome task, but my friends, alas! have "dispersed and wandered far away! far away?" True, Peter threw me a despairing glance, when marched off by the fair "Marta," which, though flattering to my vanity, could not relieve my present unhappy condition.

Even Syd had deserted.

Making the best of circumstances, I say, crossly:

"Come on, let us find the others."

"Suppose we remain," he suggests, "I am awfully contented."

"I am not;" I answer, by no means desirous of a *tete-a-tete*, "but do as you like."

"Whither thou goest, I will go!" he answers, offering his arm.

The brilliant moonlight falls with a soft radiance about us, flooding both land and sea with its clear, white sheen.

Several couples promenade the sands, while others sit upon the high shell bank. Before we reach the first group Syd runs towards us, a tin can held carefully in one hand, the other placed firmly over it.

"I say, Miss Nel," he says in a mysterious whisper, "which is Miss Clarke's bed?"

"Third from camp," I return. "Why do you ask?"

"Nothin'," he answers, running briskly along.

"That tin can means mischief," laughs my companion. "Shall we warn Miss Clarke?"

"Do not tell tales!" I answer.

"Oh, Miss Kieth, we were just wishing for you,"

says Mr. Keyson, who, with several others, sits upon the upper ledge. "Come give us a song—music is all we need this perfect night."

"Don't stop," pleads my companion, "walking is much nicer."

"No," I answer, determined to be disagreeable, "moonlight always makes me sentimental."

"And how," he asks, "does that state affect you?"

"Why, like other romantic damsels, I 'for my absent lover sigh!' Isn't that the correct thing?"

"Have you an absent lover?" he asks anxiously.

"Really, Mr. Kieth, considering our *great intimacy*——"

"Excuse me," he interrupts, "I forgot myself."

"Oh Mees Nelson!" calls Peter, "hurry mit dot song!"

Working myself up to a feeling of passionate yearning I sing "Dreams."

"When I look back, on days gone by,
I dream of thee, dear one,
Then grows my soul so sad and drear,
Aye sadder than——"

Before I finish the first verse, Peter, who is easily touched by music, is in tears.

"How could you sing that sad, sad song?" says Miss Clarke, sympathetically wiping her dry eyes. "Do give us something comic."

I glance at my audience—my enemy is looking quite subdued. Mr. Keyson wears a far away look, as though his mind was filled with long dead memories. His wife, alone, is unmoved—either she has no emotion, or keeps it under strict control.

They certainly need diversion; so I sing, in my lightest, most flippant tone, that famous old love song, "Rory O'More."

The rest of our party, attracted by the music now join us, and Kenneth begs for a Scotch ballad.

"What do you want?" I ask.

"'John Anderson my Joe,'" says Kieth.

"Yes," returns Kenneth, "that is my favorite.'

As I sing, some irresistible force compels me to look directly at my enemy. I try not to, for I seem to sing to him alone—but try as I will my eyes seek his.

"Do give us another!" begs the party.

But I cannot; I am perfectly helpless. Singing never affected me so strangely before. We lie there and plan for to-morrow, our last day of idle enjoyment, then depart, "each to his narrow bed."

Scarcely have our heads touched the pillow, when blood-curdling screams float upon the air! I raise my bar aud reconnoitre. The cries of anguish proceed from feminine voices, and from the bars of the Misses Clarke and Lang. Soon the protecting cheese-cloth is torn aside, and three maidens, two young, one old, caper madly about, making frantic efforts to free themselves of some crawling object.

"What is it?" I ask, as they approach nearer.

"Fiddlers!" they yell in chorus. "Mercy, they are down my back! O-o-o-o! One is on my head! Do take this one from my toe!" were some of the exclamations heard.

"Syd's little game," I think to myself, but say nothing.

Mr. and Mrs. Keyson soon relieve the ladies of their troublesome guests, and "silence settles, deep and still" over our little encampment.

Day is just breaking, when the now familiar "cow holler" from Syd's strong lungs, disturbs our pleasant slumbers. We rise without a murmur, and

dress in haste, for to-day we fish for tarpon—that great silver king of South Florida waters.

Before starting, the gentlemen test their lines; an important precaution which should never be neglected. Securing the hook to a tree, or other immovable object, they move backwards fifty or a hundred feet, and bear steadily upon the line, imitating, as far as possible the movements of Mr. Tarpon. This test is very thorough; all your strength being exercised in an effort to break the line. If anything gives way, it should be the rod; for a line which cannot stand this test is utterly worthless for tarpon, and will prove only a 'vexation of spirit" to its unhappy owner.

There are so many ways—unavoidable ways—by which a tarpon may escape from even an experienced angler, that no man can afford to trifle with poor tackle. There are times in the life of every "tarponer," when he feels, acutely, that it "would be better if he had never been born." For nothing in heaven or earth is so calculated to make men swear as the loss of this gamey fish through defective tackle. Syd declares he has seen great, strong men, the fathers of many children, actually shed tears of mortification over the breaking of a line or defect in the snood.

We divide into parties of four, and, with rods, reels and lunch baskets securely packed in small boats, proceed to a pass long famed for tarpon.

Miss Clarke, Mr. Kieth and I, who are in the Captain's boat, arrive at the fishing ground about seven o'clock. Our boats lie within talking distance, though not near enough to interfere with each other.

Mr. Tarpon feeds in shallow water, and is quite

dainty about his fare. We drop our hooks, baited with half a mullet, and possess our souls with patience. Half an hour of suspense ensues, when Mr. Kieth exhibits traces of unusual excitement! His line is being drawn out slowly, at first, then more rapidly; a tarpon has been hooked. He lets her run fifty feet, then begins winding in; out she goes again!

Syd, who is nearest us, shouts, "Let her go Gallagher!"

Peter hoists full sail, and away we go—like the wind! The other boats keep at a respectful distance, for there is, necessarily, much courtesy in tarpon fishing.

Kieth grits his teeth, pulls his hat well over his eyes, braces his feet, and works hard at his reel. Peter gives several excited instructions. Now our monarch of the deep begins to feel the pressure upon his mighty jaws, and leaps high in air! His silver scales sparkle in the sun-light like so many jewels! Down he plunges—and again the mad race begins.

Mr. Tarpon's sagacity amounts almost to reason; his cunning in baffling his enemies would do credit to a first-class politician. Mr. Kieth is actually pale with excitement, but plays his fish well. This performance, with slight variations, continues three mortal hours; when, just as we are sure of our prey, the wary fish gives a "give me liberty or give me death" plunge, and—is gone!

Poor Kieth pulls his hat still further over his eyes, and drops his hands helplessly to his sides. His whole figure assumes a hopeless, reckless expression, but he utters not a word. He has since acknowledged, that he swore, inwardly, the rest of the day.

Peter gives a great sob, Miss Clarke sighs sympathetically, and I—to keep from crying—laugh hysterically. I can't see my enemy's face, but he turns his back with an angry gesture.

I am sorry, and begin to explain, when my own line demands attention. My heart beats almost to suffocation—I am so excited I *must* scream—but no, that will scare the fish! Both men begin instructing me, but I beg them piteously to leave me alone —I have an idea, and want to follow it. One! two! three! leaps he makes, but I never loose my hold, and after a long and exciting chase, have the proud distinction of landing the first and only tarpon caught by our party—for landing and hooking are vastly different things!

CHAPTER XI.

"The Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."—*Sterne.*

ONE day, about the middle of December, our trustee bustled into the school-room, and asked, "Aint he most dinner time, Mees Nelson?"

"In five minutes," I reply, wondering what he wanted.

"Vell," he continues good naturedly, "let de youngsters go. I haf someting to show you."

"What is it?" I ask, tapping the bell.

"Se out side—bring your seester."

Peter is full of mystery, so I call Bess, and we follow him eagerly to the play-ground.

There stands an Indian brave in buckskin moccasins and leggins! His dark blue shirt, belted at the waist reaches his knees; a gay plaid shawl, folded on the bias, and wound into a turban is upon his head; through his belt sticks a murderous looking knife, and on his shoulders he carries the whole of a well dressed deer.

"He doesn't look very ferocious," I remark. "Where did you find him?

"Two-Tree come to trade," says Peter. "Me pring him for you to see."

"Now," exclaims Bess, "we can buy venison from a real Seminole Indian! Say, Mr. Indian, how much for your venison?" His only answer is a long stare, and an unintelligible grunt.

"Why Miss Bessie," laughs Syd, "you must break up your English, or he wont understand a word."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh you listen—I'll buy the venison for you. Hello Billy! Fine deer, you got him?"

"Uh-huh," answers the Indian, making that inarticulate sound which means yes—so easy to make, but hard to spell.

"Me buy him," continues Syd. "Money—you want him—how much?"

"Deer—you have him"—answers the brave, "two dollar."

"Whole deer too much—*ojus*. One ham—we want him—how much?"

"Twenty-five cent."

"All right—cut him off."

He lays his burden upon the grass, and taking the knife from his belt, cuts off a haunch of venison. Bess and I both attempt conversation, but he probably scorns "white squaw," for our efforts are fruitless. Syd, however, seems a favorite, and they confabulate fluently.

"Squaw—you got 'em?" questions Syd.

He gives a negative grunt, then adds, "Bime-by me ketch him."

"See," says Syd gravely, pointing first to Peter, then to Bess and me, "Red-beard, big chief—two squaw—he got 'em."

The Indian looks stolidly into our laughing faces, then answers coolly, "You lie."

Syd changes the subject.

"Turkey—you see 'em—you shoot 'em?"

Another inarticulate negative.

"*Suc-us-chay*" (all gone).

"Wyomy—you buy him?"

"Wyomy—*holy-wogus!* (no good). Send Indian, *holy-wogus,* to hell."

"Venison—you bring him again—soon?"

"Uh-huh. Two moons—me bring him."

"When you *hy-e-pus?* to-day?"

"Uh-huh. Good-bye."

He leaves us as suddenly as he came, his broad shoulders bending beneath his heavy load.

Syd, who understands all about such things, carries our venison home, carefully cuts the meat from the bone, salts and hangs in a cool place.

The Captain is delighted that we are pleased with our first Indian visitor, and promises again to make up a party to invade their camp.

We go next week to a sugar-boiling dance, from which we expect much amusement.

We are having such a lovely winter—our patrons are pleased, their children happy and de trustee enchanted. What more could we desire? True, our neighbors are uncultured, but their kindness is unbounded.

Then, of all delightful things, we have our own house, and can do, say and think just what we please. I am more thankful each day that we broke away from Uncle's cramped home-nest; for I am always disagreeable when constrained to do, or not to do. And poor, dear old Uncle even denied us the feminine luxury of discussing our neighbors. I verily believe he would have controlled our thoughts had it been possible; but they, thank God, are sacred.

"Coming events cast their shadows before," says a wise writer and I certainly agreed with him that evening.

We are, as usual, entertaining our musical friends, when the Captain enters, followed by "de Jupeans."

"Dare he are, Mees Nelsonn." He hands me a letter.

"It is from Auntie?" I exclaim, tearing the envelope. "Excuse me, please, I have not heard from them in some time."

"He gan vait. I haf only von leetle minute to hear you sing; you vil—eh?"

"Yes;" I stick my letter in my belt, "but what is your hurry?"

"Pizness letters, vot must pe wrote for de mornint's mail. Come, you sing 'Marguerite'—he ish so sad und scheet."

He disappears with the last strains of the song, and our other guests, who usually follow his example, do likewise. The Scotchmen, however, beg to remain; and, as they have just entered, we can hardly refuse.

"I must read my letter," I say, opening it again. It is short, and to the point:

DEAR NEL:—

Your Uncle has taken the Florida fever, and insists on spending the winter with you. We start day after to-morrow, and will probably reach you as soon as this. Engage board or furnished rooms for us, and oblige, AUNTIE."

"'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!"' I cry in horror.

"What has happened?" all ask in alarm.

"Something *awful!*" I answer in despair.

"Is Uncle ill, or *dead?*" asks Bess.

"Worse than that—far worse. He is coming to spend the winter with us!"

"Merciful heavens!" she cries, "what have we done to deserve such terrible punishment?"

"And only think," I continue mournfully, "he may remain till Spring. I expect them to-morrow. Oh, I wish dear old Peter was hear! I know he would help us out of the 'de-fik'ulty.'"

"Perhaps we can aid you," suggests Mr. Kieth.

"Command us, Miss Kieth," says Kenneth. "We would gladly serve you."

"Would you? I should be eternally grateful. You see, Uncle is terribly eccentric, which, of course, is very trying. You must humor his whims, or he will dislike you intensely, and take no trouble to disguise his feelings. Then, he is so very industrious, that if he comes down here with nothing to do, he will torment us beyond endurance. Now, that I have told the simple truth, can you make the sacrifice?"

"Of course we can."

"Remember," I continue, by way of warning, "he is very disagreeable; he will think nothing of calling you chuckle-head, idiot, or even *fool!*"

"'What's in a name?'" quotes Mr. Kieth.

"And you will honestly try to keep him away from us?"

"Yes; we will take him tarponing, and encourage him to swear at the big fish, instead of ourselves. In fact, we shall tire him so completely that he will gladly retire early; and, as your Western poet would say, 'the subsequent proceedings will interest him no more.'"

"Well," I return, full of gratitude, "if you do so much in the cause of helpless womankind, I am sure you will be properly rewarded above."

"I expect an earthly recompense," remarks Kenneth, with a sly look at Bess.

"Blessed are they that expect nothing;" laughs she, "for they shall not be disappointed."

"I do not know where to put them," I continue, "unless we give them this room; and that would break into our gatherings."

"Why," says Bess, "they can have our room, and we'll sleep here. The boys can help us move things to-morrow."

"Don't worry too much," says Kieth, as he says good-night.

"Very comforting advice, if one could follow it," I return mournfully. "I unfortunately, am not a strong-minded female."

"I should never call you a clinging vine," he laughs.

"Hardly—though I greatly admire the sturdy oak."

"Still, you never cling."

"No, I like independence."

"But the oak loves the vine."

"Perhaps—but good-night, and many thanks for your timely assistance."

CHAPTER XII.

"Men think all men mortal but themselves."—*Young.*

ONE of Uncle's peculiarities is a great aversion to spider-webs, dirt-dauber's nests, flies, mosquitoes and insects of any kind. Auntie, owing to her weak eyes and disinclination for hard work, is not so pronounced. If the breakfast table was literally covered with ants, or the wall and ceiling gracefully draped with cobweb, she remained blissfully unconscious of her sins of omission till rudely awakened to their enormity by her grumbling spouse. So, with a lively recollection of his keen eyes and sharp tongue, we sweep, dust and scrub our abode. There is not a servant in the neighborhood, so we set manfully to work, Syd and George helping us.

The Captain, who went "wid de steamer," promised to devote himself to our relative on the return trip, and our Scotchmen, I know, will be towers of strength.

I am afraid I am really learning to like my enemy. He has been so kind and considerate, so thoughtful and tender, that at times I almost forget that horrid letter.

In due time the steamer whistles, and we, attended by the whole school, rush to the wharf.

Auntie sheds a few tears of joy as she warmly embraces us; but Uncle, after a cold little peck up-

on our foreheads, looks suspicious, as he says, grumpily:

"What the dickens have you been doing with yourselves since you left? You actually look happy."

"We are," retorts saucy Bess.

"Nothing like occupation," I reply, trying to avert a homily.

"Why, who is that?" cries Bess, in surprise. "Why, it can't be—yes, it is——"

"Are you surprised to see me?" Mr. King looks searchingly into my sister's coquettish face, as he warmly presses her little hand.

"Yes;" she answers, "but delighted!"

"You might have said you were coming," I remark, wondering where on earth he will dispose of himself.

Mr. Kieth, whom I sometimes fancy is a mind-reader, says pleasantly:

"As M——— cannot boast of a hotel, Mr. King, I hope you will share our lodgings. We are, I presume, here for the same sport, so must necessarily prove congenial spirits."

"You are very kind——" begins Mr. King.

"Not at all," interrupts the other. "Kenneth and I are just longing for another fellow to listen to our big-fish stories. Say yes, and we'll conduct you in state to our floating palace," making a grandiloquent gesture towards their launch.

"Of course he'll say yes;" laughs Bess, "and be thankful for the opportunity. Good-by, you may all come up after supper."

"Who are those young chuckle-heads?" asks Uncle, scowling upon their retreating forms.

"They are Scotch," I return shortly.

"Umph! You seem pretty thick, considering you've not known them three months."

"Yes," I answer sweetly, "they have been most kind—lately—and we appreciate their efforts accordingly."

"Pshaw! I don't approve of intimacy with perfect strangers. You know I objected to this cussed project of yours, from the very beginning——"

"Yes, I know you did—but just look at that alligator pear tree! isn't it a beauty? And did you ever see anything prettier than that tall waving bamboo?"

"Oh they *look* well enough, but such taste! I tried to eat a sour-sop last night. You needn't think to stuff me with these wretched fruits! As for your precious guava, the very smell will knock a man down. I would not give one good old Virginia apple for all your alligator-pears, custard-apples and mangoes in Christendom!"

"Hush!" I laugh, "you will be converted in less than a month."

They are greatly surprised when we take them to our own cozy home; and Uncle fusses and fumes. He did not expect to, and will not settle down on us for the winter, unless, indeed, he furnishes everything; if not, he will return home on the next boat. So I pacify him with a promise to share expenses.

The poor fellow growls as much as ever; nothing escapes him. But then, that is his normal condition. I am amused, though, at supper, when he hands his saucer to be refilled with guavas, not knowing 'twas the despised fruit he had so roundly rated.

"Now this," he remarks, as he critically surveys the beautifully colored fruit, from which all seeds

had been extracted, "is quite eatable. Reminds me somewhat of strawberries. What do you call it?"

"Guava," laughs Bess.

"Pshaw! You cannot fool me. What is it, Nel?''

How disgusted he was! Sat there growling, at everything under the sun. He swore that oranges were nothing more than sweetened water; mangoes a mixture of tow, sugar and turpentine; avocado pears soap; cocoanuts, bananas and pineapples, indigestible stuff unfit for the stomach of any decent man."

I was not sorry when a stream of company interrupted this tirade.

"What are those people coming here for?" he demands crossly.

"Oh," I answer, "we have company every evening."

"Umph! I hope they do not stay late?"

"Not very. We usually get to bed by eleven o'clock."

"Well, I'll be-doggoned if I'm going to sit up that late!"

"Why, no. Go to bed when you like—we won't mind,'

He talks pleasantly enough to our friends, and, to my surprise, seems deeply interested in the Scotchmen.

"I say, Mr. Kieth," he calls, "are you and my girls related?"

"I do not know;" returns my enemy, "but hope we *may* be."

"You are from Scotland?"

"Yes?"

"Well, they have a rascally cousin over there, that's just cheated them out of a cool million."

"Really?" much interested.

"Yes, and all because a d——d will got mislaid. We know, well enough, it was made in Nel's favor, but——"

"Uncle," I interrupt, not wishing him to discuss this subject, "Mr. Lindsey is anxious to take you tarponing to-morrow; will you be too tired to go?"

"Tired? Do you take me for an old granny? Of course I will go!" and to my relief they launch into a series of fish stories.

Of course, while they are so good, I must behave decently to my enemy; and how can I, when we discuss property?

Auntie and Mrs. Keyson are having a quiet chat on the sofa, Bess and Mr. King are similarly engaged at the end of the room—my enemy necesarily falls to my lot.

"So you are a great heiress?" he begins, looking much interested.

"Yes, minus the money."

"But is there no hope of finding the will?"

"I fear not."

"Have you seen him—this scoundrelly cousin, who defrauds you?"

"How can you ask?" I return indignantly.

"Why, you might compromise matters——"

"Never! Either *all* is mine, or nothing!"

Just then the clock strikes nine. Uncle breaks off an unfinished sentence and starts for the door.

"All *decent* people should be in their beds," he remarks, as he disappears without a good-night. Auntie dutifully follows in his wake.

Our guests stare in mute amaze.

"Shall we follow suit?" asks Kenneth.

"No," I answer. "Wait for danger signals."

"What are they?" he laughs.

"The first will appear in a minute."

Sure enough, one of Uncle's shoes is thrown heavily to the floor, shortly followed by it's fellow. Our more timid guests start with dismay and depart in haste; but the Scotchmen and King remain for further demonstrations.

After knocking down everything within reach, he begins on his poor old throat; clearing, scraping and snorting to such an extent I am afraid he will break a blood-vessel.

We enjoy this performance in silence. At last, finding us still unmoved, he calls:

"Nel!"

"Yes, Uncle."

"Have those young fools gone yet?"

Our only answer is a shout of laughter. Now he begins again:

"I say, girls, be sure you put out the light when you go to bed—if you ever get the chance to go."

"Very well, Uncle."

"We had better go, boys," says Kieth, "or he will dislike us too much for further association."

"Then go at once," I say decidedly. "He *must* like you—our personal safety demands it. Good-night—and be sure you charm him off in the morning."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love."—*Shakespeare.*

TRUE to their promise, our Scotchmen adopt Uncle, relieving us almost entirely of him. To use his own expression, he is so "dead tired" on reaching home, that he retires immediately after supper, and is heard from no more till morning.

Auntie, who is having a delightfully peaceful visit, often wishes that tarpon fishing could last the rest of their natural lives.

Uncle, surprising to relate, has taken a strong fancy to our Scotch friends—especially Kieth—and never tires of praising them. De Captain, unfortunately, is not so favored. For Peter is what Auntie calls a "patient sitter," and, like Uncle himself, is too dogmatic and excitable for argument.

Bess is in her element, with "two strings to her bow," and plays her cards well—keeping both men happy. I sometimes wonder which she prefers, but doubt if she really knows. Both men, if I judge correctly, have strong, passionate natures and will brook no trifling. I am curious to see the result of this double flirtation.

Auntie and Uncle decline accompanying us to the Sugar-house dance. So, after an early supper, we

join a merry wagon-full of young people, and start for the frolic.

Loud sounds of dancing reach us long before we arrive at the brilliantly lighted Sugar-house. They are not "tripping the light, fantastic toe," neither is it "fairy-like" music which greets us above the wild shuffle of brogans, and the deafening shouts of "Ladies to the right! Swing or cheat! Balance all! Hands all a-round! Promenade all! First Couple out! Swing! Ladies' Chain!" etc., etc.

We enter. Sixteen couples are rushing through a quadrille. The girls are gorgeous in red, blue and yellow calicoes, profusely trimmed in course lace and bright ribbons, their hair hanging loose upon their shoulders. Most of the men are mill hands, and wear colored flannel shirts, with their pantaloons stuffed into long, rawhide boots.

An old darkey scrapes his violin, another picks the banjo, while a little negro boy strikes the triangle. Set follows set, in rapid succession. Round dances are unknown. We do not join the dancers; indeed, personal safety demands that we keep at a respectful distance from this crowd of heavy shoes. It is real enjoyment, though to watch the little airs and graces of these rustic belles, the awkward advances of their admirers, and the good natured fun so prevalent among them all.

By-and-by, the girls declare themselves "plumb tired out," and insist on resting "a spell." A man, whose grey flannel shirt is decorated with bright red trimmings, who wears new and creaky boots, and flourishes a yellow silk handkerchief, now announces supper. There is a wild scramble for the supper room. But he of the red trimmings guards the door, permitting only a limited number to pass.

When these, being satisfied, return, he announces, "Them thet hes et will please set down, an' them thet is ter eat kin step this way."

While the dancers are feasting, Peter and Mr. Kieth approach the fiddler and ask some question; he looks puzzled, shakes his head, then hands his instrument to Peter. De Captain begins playing an exquisite waltz.

"Can you resist that?" asks my enemy.

"Who could?" I return as we glide over the rough boards.

The others soon join us.

Mr. Kieth is a delighful partner; we seem to float rather than touch the floor.

"How lovely!" I exclaim, as the music ceases. "I could go on forever!"

"Come outside;" he whispers, "the moon is perfect."

He throws a wrap about me, and we walk slowly down the road till we reach the calm, moon-lit creek. An old oak grows at the water's edge, and to it is fastened a tiny boat. "Get in;" says my companion. "I will row you up the stream."

On we go, scarcely uttering a word; so completely are we bewitched by the wierd beauty of our surroundings.

"Nel," he says, as we leave the boat and turn towards the house, "you know I love you."

"Hush!" I exclaim impatiently. "You are spoiling everything."

"But love, you *must* marry me some day."

"*Marry you?*"

"Yes, dear."

"I would see you in the lower regions first!" I cry hotly. "You are adding insult to injury, sir!"

"Explain your words, Miss Kieth," his tone is polite, but commanding. "You have insinuated too much."

He certainly acts the injured man to perfection.

"Explanations are needless!" I return in lofty scorn. "You have treated me as no *gentleman* would, and now I hate—yes, actually *loathe* you!" I withdraw my hand from his arm, and for the next few minutes we stand and glare angrily at each other. Then to my utter disgust, he breaks into a hearty laugh.

"Well," I remark dryly, when he had somewhat recovered, "I hope you enjoy the situation. *I* see nothing to laugh at."

"I know," he returns apologetically, "I should become tragic—threaten to cut my throat, blow my brains out, or some such bosh—but you must excuse me. I never could do the correct thing."

"Why do you laugh?" I ask indignantly. "If you really love me——"

"That's just why," he laughs again. "I know perfectly well that you return my love——"

"I do not!"

"And are overpowering me with ugly names simply because you fancy I've wronged you. Come, now, honor bright, don't you?"

"*Fancied!* can you deny——"

"I deny nothing—haven't the remotest idea what crime you accuse me of—but I *know* you love me, and will one day tell me so."

"Never!"

"Yes you will, and I feel sure that you—not I—will do the final lovemaking."

"I shall leave, before you insult me further?" I exclaim, starting for the house.

"This is nonsense, Nel," he turns in a perfect good humor. "You will be my wife within a year, so you may as well accept the inevitable."

"I shall never be your wife! I despise you utterly."

"Restrain your loving epithets; they will hurt you fearfully by-and-bye."

"You are mean, cowardly, and unmanly!"

"Remember," he warns, "you shall pay me in kisses for all of this."

"And if you were the last man on earth, I wouldn't marry you!"

"My dear child, there is no use exhausting yourself. I've made up my mind, and shall win you. Nothing you say can alter me. And you—when you recover from this foolish prank—will love me ardently. You do now, but would die before you'd own it."

"How I wish," I exclaim in despair, "you were twenty years younger!"

I am terribly angry at being taken possession of so calmly; indignant that he *won't* understand how I regard his past unkindness, and thoroughly disgusted that I cannot force him to acknowledge his outrageous conduct.

"I understand," he remarks leisurely, "it would give you keen joy to punch my head—would it not?"

"Yes," I admit, with candor.

"Well, when we are married——"

"If you do not let me alone, I will—I will——"

"For heaven's sake, don't cry!"

"Do you think I would shed *one* tear for you?

"Yes. You will shed any quantity, when you get home. I bet a tarpon your eyes are red tomorrow."

"You are a brute! A horrid——"

"Vy, dare dey ish!" exclaims Peter; and I run joyfully to meet him.

They are all ready to start back, he informs me, so we hurry to the wagon and are soon driving homeward.

"Let me sit by you, Captain?" I beg.

"All ride!" he answers, with a pleasant laugh.

"I have a long account against you," whispers my enemy, as, passing me, he settles down between Bess and Miss Lang.

The air is cool, for it lacks but a week to Christmas. I draw my wrap more closely about me, and listen patiently to Peter's funny talk. The dear fellow is quite scientific, and just now is giving me a lengthy dissertation on "de daclination ob de nort star, de rorepory allis and de sun spots."

I lend one ear to Peter, the other to the gay crowd behind. Bess is flirting outrageously, and the others are no better. I turn, and give them a stern look; but good, indulgent old Peter says:

"Let dem alone. Dey haffin goot dimes; he ish nottings."

They beg Mr. Kieth and me for a duet, but I refuse. He then offers to sing alone, "provided our *prima donna* will turn her face." I comply, being overpowered by numbers; and he meanly looks straight into my eyes as he sings "My Queen."

Music affects me powerfully; and, though I despise myself for relenting, I am drawn, irresistably, to the singer.

He sings for me alone and every note thrills my very soul! But oh! I am so disgusted with his baseness, my weakness, the Captain's science and all the gay clatter, that I am thankful when we reach home.

"My enemy springs forward to assist me, but I turn to Peter.

"I will see you in the morning," he says laughing lightly.

"You will not; I shall be too busy,"

But see him I did. School had just begun when he appeared in the doorway.

Greatly against my will, I step forward and ask:

"What do you want?"

"To examine your eyes," he returns coolly. "Yes," after a critical inspection, "you did cry last night."

"What right have you——"

"Now, sweetheart——"

"My name is *Kieth!*" I cry in great wrath.

"So is mine; so you need only change the Miss."

"Go!" I cry, rudely closing the door upon him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Tis well to be off with the old love,
Before you are on with the new."

SATURDAY afternoon I steal out to finish a little sketch I am making for Auntie's Christmas present.

Regardless of red bugs, I sit flat upon the ground, am soon completely absorbed in my work.

Suddenly, voices approach, and their owners, unconscious of a listener, seat themselves within hearing. How embarrassing! But what can I do? I am compelled to finish my work, for this is my last leisure day.

To be sure, I might move; but this is my most advantageous position. Shall I sacrifice art to good manners? No. I determine to "turn a deaf ear," and succeed admirably, until, in a moment of excitement, they raise their voices, and I discover that Bess and Mr. King are enjoying what they fondly suppose to be a *tete-a-tete*.

I clear my throat and give a warning cough, but, as they are too deeply engaged to observe these warnings, I am forced to resign myself to the unenviable position of an eavesdropper.

"Now, do not be absurd!"

"Absurd?" he answers. "I have been as patient as Job! Human nature rebels against such treatment. Surely you can choose between us. Come, which is it?"

"How can I tell?" returns my provoking sister.

"Does your heart speak for neither?"

"Honestly, it does not; I am so fond of both, that it is a regular case of 'how happy could I be with either, were t'other dear charmer away.'"

"You are trifling. You know I love you——"

"You have told me often."

"And you promised to be my wife."

"Yes—some day."

"Then why flirt so openly with another?"

"I am not flirting—only having a good time. Surely you are not so selfish as to spoil fun?"

"Then why not tell him of our engagement? He is desperately in love; perhaps you will throw me over and take him!"

"Now don't be worrying. You know, very well, I never pretended to love you—only promised to try. If you were content then why grumble now? Frankly, I do not *love* either of you, but am wonderfully fond of both."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes."

"Then you are not the girl I thought you——"

"Oh well, if you are tired of what you are pleased to term our engagement, I am agreeable; do not trouble yourself to be stiff and unfriendly, for it will have no effect."

"You are a heartless flirt!"

"What, beginning already? Why can we not be dear, good friends without this nonsense?"

"Do you you think I enjoy seeing you engrossed by that Scotchman?"

"Why not? He is very handsome!"

"Yes, too handsome!"

"You should feel proud that your sweetheart is so

admired. Now I am charmed when girls think you nice. I take it as a personal compliment; for you know, you *belong* to me.'

"And you to me?"

"Perhaps; but you must not become jealous, and disagreeable."

"I will be anything, put up with anything, if you are only sweet!"

"Well, aint I always sweet?"

"No, you precious little humbug!"

"You had better hush, if you can say nothing nicer than that. We must go home anyhow, for the sun is almost down."

Their voices gradually die away, and I am alone once more. So this, then, is the situation—two lovers, and no decided preference. How will it end? I finish my work, and walk slowly homeward. Only three days before Christmas, and so very much to be done; a tree for the children, decorations for the school-housee, suitable music, and a number of other things. But then, comes two weeks' rest.

The steamer is just in, and Peter is walking up the street beside a tall, slender woman. "Oh, my prophetic soul!" Can she be Mrs. Lefon? We approach. 'Tis she; a wave of disappointment sweeps over my soul. I have an unaccountable dread of this fair, calmly possessive widow. Of course I don't believe in dreams, but somehow——

"Good-evening, Miss Kieth," she says, in her cool, sweet voice.

I shake her daintily gloved hand, but cannot express pleasure at seeing her.

"Where will you stop?" I ask, remembering my manners. "We will call in a few days."

"At Mrs. Keyson's, for the present, but will visit around generally," she returns.

"I am sorry," I say, lying politely, "we are too crowded to have you with us."

"Yes," she returns coolly, "I always stay in the Captain's house. I bring my cook, and keep house regularly."

"What a pity that I have usurped your place!" She gives me a searching glance, but deciding my remark is innocent, replies quietly, "I am content. Of course it was unavoidable, and the Captain did not know I would object. Ah, here we are at your gate—good-night! I will expect you soon."

How tiresome! I wonder how long she will stay? Of course she will monopolize "de Captain," and so throw me still more with my enemy. His manner is so cool and aggravating that it almost maddens me; for he insists that I love him, and only laughs when I vow that I detest him. Resist as I may, he is always victorious, and so exasperatingly good-natured!

I am bound to confess that he possesses a strange power over me; his voice draws me irresistibly. And when he sings, I love him intensely, and long to throw my arms about him and have him draw me close, close to his heart. But, through it all, I never forget he is my enemy. Though he assumes the air of an accepted lover, and *will* call me "Nel," he has never attempted to touch me—for which I am devoutly thankful—but teasingly declares I shall pay exorbitant interest later on. I am under everlasting obligations for his kindness to Uncle; and then, what can a poor girl do when a handsome man assumes such masterful possession?

The Captain drops in for a few moments after sup-

per to ask if Mrs. Lefon may join our Indian excursion.

I tell him candidly that I will not enjoy it and would rather not go.

"Vell den, spose ve not see de Injunts dis time, but vait for de green corn dance?"

"When is that?"

"Oh, he long in de sphring, ven de rostin-years coom. Dey haf pig doins at dot dance, und he last tree day und night! You like him—eh?"

"Very well. Of course I'm disappointed, but can manage very well without the trip."

"No indeeds! me got noter drip—ve go up de river, und camp two tree day at Fort T——. Vot you dinks mit him?"

"Oh that will be lovely! Just our same crowd?"

"Und Mees Lefon."

"Yes, I suppose she'll have to come."

"Me ferry sorry—but," with a quaint little shrug, "vot kin I do? Vot for you not lofe her? Se fine vomans."

"Why," I laugh, "because she takes you away from me. Do you think I like that?"

"You know I lofe but you!" he exclaims, blushing hotly.

"But I know you'll marry her, one of these days." I answer teasingly.

"Neffer! I vont none but you, und you I can not haf!"

"'Actions speak louder than word.'" I laugh. "What! going already? I wish, you a charming evening, with the fair widow."

CHAPTER XV.

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods."—*Byron.*

AWAY we steam, up stream. The Indians were true to nature in calling this lovely stream "*Caloosahatchee*"—"beautiful river." Beautiful Island and her sister keys are far behind, and the river narrows at every bend. The low banks are completely covered by tropic vegetation; lofty cabbage palms mingling their graceful foliage with the darker green of immense, moss draped cypress trees and lovely water oaks. Every bend discloses grand old trees, gracefully entwined with drooping vines, many of which are filled with flowers.

Brilliant orchids adorn the trunks of both oaks and palms, while, just at the water's edge, nestle clusters of pure white lilies.

The waters are clear, possessing wonderful reflective qualities. The grassy slope, with its thick mass of foliage, each blade of grass and half opened flower is beautifully reflected; so accurately indeed, that the mirrored object is more attractive than its counterpart. Alligators float lazily about, and some few are sunning themselves upon floating logs or fallen trees. Our sportsmen are constantly shooting, but rarely hit one; for Mr. 'Gator, when in danger, ducks his head, to appear at a safer distance.

We are more successful with wild ducks, how-

ever; and Mr. King actually kills a water-turkey, which he promises to have mounted for Bess.

Uncle growls every time he misses, but keeps on shooting, with pertinacity worthy of a better cause.

De Captain is completely absorbed by Mrs. Lefon. He makes desperate efforts to be civil to me, but she frustrates every attempt.

"I think she'll propose this trip," whispers Syd. "I'll keep an eye on them, and we'll have some fun."

"Hush! you rascal!" I say reprovingly.

"Oh, I know a few things," he returns wisely.

"Well," I continue, "don't let your thirst for knowledge lead you into disgraceful eavesdropping."

"Now, Miss Nel, you needn't preach. There's no harm in a little lark like that. I dearly love to hear folks spoon; it sounds so silly, you know."

"Dear boy, wait till you sprout a moustache; your sentiments will change with each downy hair."

"What do you take me for?" he demands indignantly.

Syd is well versed in Indian lore, and tells me much that transpired on these now peaceful shores "long before either of us were born;" but 'tis hard to believe that these calm blue waters have really witnessed such fearful tragedies.

We camp for the night at Ft. D———; but, though a voting precinct, and post office, the houses and inhabitants are "conspicuous by their absence."

There was, during the Indian wars, a line of forts and block-houses, extending along the river from

Fort T——— to M———, but not the slightest sign of fortification exists to-day. True, M——— possesses several objects of historic interest—the soldier's cemetery, the old cement cistern, and the date-palm planted by General Hancock's daughter. But alack-a-day! Those who "could a tale unfold," which, no doubt "would harrow up our souls," and, by its horrible details of rapine and massacre "cause each particular hair to stand on end," have long since departed to "that undiscovered country, whence no traveller returns."

We stretch our bars, for the mosquitoes are out in force; then watch Mrs. Lefon and de Captain prepare supper. Strictly speaking, he does the work, while she looks on approvingly. Her long, slender white hands would look decidedly out of place among pots and pans. She is a bit of Dresden china—not so useful as common delf, but *so* fair to look upon.

Uncle, I am delighted to say, is pleased for once in his life; for he has proved the most successful fisherman of our party. Ten minutes after landing, he brings to camp a string of black bass—perfect beauties—and is in such a splendid humor, that he forgets to grumble. But alas! it is short lived. We retire; and the drowsy god is just wooing me into dreamland, when my rosy visions are rudely broken by an angry snort.

"What the devil does this mean?" cries our ogre. "I would like to know what idiot let these cussed insects into my bar! No one but a heathen or a Florida cracker could sleep in such a swarm! Who did it, I say!"

We all deny the offence, and assist, with much warmth in routing the invaders.

I shrewdly suspect Syd, but am too sleepy for investigation.

I do not know how long we had slept, when another terrific yell brings a head from each bar. Oh, what a sight greets us!

The ruddy camp fire reveals to our startled gaze, my dignified Uncle, prancing wildly about in undress uniform, making frantic efforts to kill some object upon the ground.

"What's the matter?" we cry in alarm.

"Snakes!" he roars, renewing his efforts at destruction.

"Vot in de debble ish you raisin' dis shindy for?" inquires Peter angrily.

"Umph!" growls Uncle, "I'd like to see the man that wouldn't raise a row to find a rattlesnake in his bed! I might as well be in India as this God-forsaken place."

"Oh, come now, draw it mild!" cries Syd, who has just recovered from a paroxysm of laughter. "You can't make us believe that a snake deliberately crawled into your bar for companionship. Florida snakes are more discriminating."

"Did you kill it?" Auntie nervously enquires.

"Oh," says Syd, "it's dead enough! If it had stayed there a week 'twould not have bitten him!"

"What do you know about it, you young rascal?"

"I don't tell all I know," returns the saucy lad.

"I wish you would go to bed," moans Bess. "I am *so* sleepy."

"And Uncle," I plead, "please do not rouse us up again. I know I shall have a terrible headache."

"Yes," he growls, "you do nothing but grumble, grumble, grumble! If you think I am going to

sleep with snakes and other vile reptiles, you are mistaken! But that is just the way! some people have neither love nor gratitude for their own flesh and blood. If you had listened to me you would have stayed at home; then I would not be in this cussed country! I wish to the Lord I was back——"

"Amen!" comes devoutly from Syd.

"You young scoundrel——"

"Good-night, Uncle," I say with the vain hope of quieting him.

But no; he sits there grumbling to his heart's content; abusing us collectively and individually. Most of the vituperation falls on poor little me; for, was not I the arch-fiend who, by my glowing description, inveigled him to this "cussed country?"

I wish, from the depth of my heart that I had never written a word of praise. I never asked, nor wanted him to come, and now—truly, "the way of the transgressor is hard."

CHAPTER XVI.

"The woman who throws herself at a man's head, will soon find herself at his feet."—*Desnoyers.*

NEXT morning we steam higher up the river to Fort T———, where we spend two days hunting and fishing. I am glad I brought my sketch-book, for the scenery is picturesquely beautiful.

I am surprised, the morning after our arrival, to be joined by Mr. Kieth, his hands full of drawing material.

"We may as well work together," he remarks, seating himself near me. "What point are you taking? Ah," looking over my shoulder, "that is good. I shall sketch those oaks, showing a glimpse of prairie beyond their grand old trunks, and the flowing river as a foreground."

"And those fleecy clouds will make a lovely background."

"Yes, they take the place of mountains, I shall copy mine in oils, and throw in an Indian or two."

"Indeed! Where will you procure a model?"

"Oh," coolly, "I shall accompany you to the green-corn dance."

"What!" I cry with indignation. "Stay till June just for that?"

"Not entirely," he answers calmly. "But really, Nel, do you imagine I will leave until you become my wife?"

"Then, you will stay forever!" I cry hotly.

"Oh well," much composed, "the climate suits me admirably."

"The climate is well enough; but I am going to the mountains next summer."

"So am I."

"Have you nothing to do?" I ask in scorn. "I despise an idler."

"Present company of course, excepted."

"A man who wastes all of his time and brains (if he has any) on hunting and fishing, is utterly contemptible!"

"Certainly, dear girl, I agree with you, heartily."

"Then why do it?"

"I do not. You forget, I am simply waiting for my wife."

"You are the most exasperating creature I ever met!"

"I can return the compliment," he laughs.

"I tell you, once for all—I shall never marry you!"

"You shall," he returns quietly. "And moreover, you will repent in sackcloth and ashes of these mean little speeches. When we are married I shall——"

"Let me alone!" I cry desperately.

"Nel," he says tenderly, "why struggle against your fate? You are mine—by that inscrutable law which binds heart to heart, soul to soul! Neither of us can sever the sacred cord which draws us involuntarily together; for Love is an attribute of God Himself, and lives through all eternity!"

"You would soon tire of the sacred cord if you lived with me; for I am closely related to Uncle."

"Oh I like a woman with temper. We can quarrel, then enjoy the sweets of reconciliation."

"But I am to become Mrs. Peter; a handsome couple—eh? "

"Nonsense! The widow is far ahead."

"I shall never believe it," I return with warmth.

But alas for my hopes! As we sit, busily working, the couple under discussion slowly approach. We see them from afar, even catching an occasional word, but they are too deeply engrossed to perceive us.

"It is coming!"

Syd, with light, cautious footsteps, has just joined us.

"I have been watching them over an hour. Now for some fun!" he smothers a laugh.

"What mischief are you up to?" enquires Mr. Kieth.

"Oh nothin'!" with an innocent grin. "You just wait."

"Why," I explain, "Syd is vainly hoping that Mrs. Lefon will propose to dear old Peter.'

"Syd's head is level," laughs my enemy. "Your chances grow beautifully less."

"Then," I return feelingly, "we must watch, and when she makes it too hot for the poor fellow, rush to the rescue."

"Yes," admits Kieth, "a man is calculated to need assistance under such conditions."

"I say, Mr. Kieth, "exclaims Syd," what would you do if a woman—Miss Nel, for instance—should tackle you!"

"Hush, Syd!" I cry. "Don't be silly."

"I don't mind telling you," returns Kieth, looking straight into my eyes, "that when Miss Nel proposes I shall accept, and expect you to dance at our wedding."

"You may, Syd, *when* I propose!" I return with dignity.

"Oh I'll bet on you, Miss Nel. I know *you'll* never do it. Now, I," in a pompous tone, "would not marry a woman who was so bold as to do the courting. I'd *scorn* her!"

"That depends," Mr. Kieth laughs. "But soft, what is the fair one saying?"

Our friends are now sitting at the foot of a giant oak; and, though we hear each word, we can neither see nor be seen.

Syd, with the daring of young America, is constantly reconnoitering; and furnishes us with such important information as "she looks fondly into his eyes—now she takes his hand—he wriggles uneasily—moves farther from her—she follows with relentless speed."

"You know, Captain," the fair Lillian's voice comes soft and low, "how lonely I have been since—since—my—poor——"

"Sobs into her handkerchief," Syd reports, peeping from our retreat.

"Yas!" Peter exclaims, much agitated. "Me know all bout him!"

"And you Captain, *dear* Captain——"

"Mine Gott!" the poor fellow exclaims.

"Could make it so much easier for me," she continues plaintively.

Peter is silent a moment, evidently collecting his wits, then asks boldly:

"Vot you vornt mit me?"

"To marry me," she returns calmly, as though she had asked him to dine.

"Shimminy crickets!" actually yells de Captain. "Vot you dakes me for? eh? Mans asks vomans to

marry mit him—he ish no goot for voomans to ask mans! No goot! No goot!'

"But *dear* Captain," she goes on tenderly, "I've waited *so* long, and you would not ask me—besides, you know, it is almost leap-year, when we have a perfect right to propose."

"I dontd gare! I dontd gare! I neffar vont likes you no more!"

"Only think," she pleads artfully, "how many nice German dishes I'll have cooked for you. You know how well I understand your taste."

"Dot ish so," he acknowledges, softening slightly.

"And I am rich," she continues eloquently, following closely her slight advantage. "You need not work so hard, but spend long, beautiful days amid Love, music, and flowers!"

"Lofe?" he exclaims, somewhat bewildered, "I lofe not you. Nother vomans I lofe mooch already. Vot den?"

"What!" she cries indignantly, "you love another?"

"Yas," he returns, unconscious of offence.

"Wretched man! Do you know what you have done?"

"Beats her breast hysterically!" reports Syd.

"No," answers Peter innocently, "vot me done?"

"You have wrecked three lives!" she cries impulsively. "Do you think I shall let her marry you? Never! I'd see her dead at my feet—yes, this hand should strike the blow—before she becomes your wife!"

"Now, den, dontd you get oxcited," says Peter soothingly. "Se not lofe me von leetle bits—se laugh mit fun ven I say 'I lofe you.' See?"

"Then dear, *dear* Peter, let *me* comfort you. I

will 'love and cherish you 'till death us do part,'" she returns solemnly.

"Mees Lefon," he says gravely, "I can neffar marry. I dells you von secret—mine fader vos a prince, und mine mudder—*vos not his wife.* You see?"

"My own dear Peter!" she exclaims tenderly. "Do you think that would matter to one who loves you? You are noble, grand, a king among men!"

"You see," he continues, "I haf no name to gif you—none dot mine childens could wear mit honor. So den, I vill neffar marry—vill raise no childens to curse mine memory."

"Oh Captain," she exclaims warmly, "you are the grandest, noblest, most self-sacrificing——"

"It ish nottings!" he interrupts hurriedly. "Gome long, let's find de odder peoples." They rise, and with their backs still to us, walk quietly away.

"Well," says Syd, "what do you think?"

"That Peter is the loveliest man in the world, and we the meanest, lowest wretches for listening," I return warmly.

"Exactly my sentiments," says Kieth. "Few men could have resisted as he did."

"I *am* sorry for old Peter," remarks Syd, "but the widow needs no sympathy. But you know, I should not be surprised if she got him after all—unless your pity becomes 'akin to love.'"

"Oh she's bespoken," laughs my enemy.

"I am not!" I cry hotly. "I'll be Mrs. Peter yet, or die in the attempt."

CHAPTER XVII.

"A jealous man wishes himself a kind of deity to the person he loves; he would be the only employment of her thoughts."—*Addison.*

MRS. LEFON, I am pleased to relate, has at last departed. Poor Peter has been in hot water; for, since that unfortunate proposal, her attentions have been more marked than ever. She evidently thinks "while there's life, there's hope," and will not resign him without a struggle. He has made many efforts to escape her, but who could succeed against such fearful odds? I, who aided and abetted him in these noble endeavors, was utterly routed, and literally forced to take a "back seat." Though her words were always smooth and polite, her eyes said plainly, "He is mine. Touch him at your peril!"

Uncle speaks of returning home, and we do not urge him to remain. He has done all in his power to render us unhappy—and, but for our Scotchmen—would have succeeded beyond his expectation. They have simply "spread themselves" in our service—taking him off every day, and actually carrying him for a three weeks' cruise on their yacht!

Mr. King has returned, with no more definite understanding than when he came; and now Kenneth has the monopoly

Does Bess love him? If so, she never shows it, and only time can tell.

Dear old Peter is growing terribly jealous of my enemy.

"He tinks you pelongs to hims!" he exclaimed angrily.

"But I don't, and never shall!" I return soothingly.

"He lofe you mooch—und you—you do effer-tings for him, ven he sing—you *lofe* him den!"

"I do not!" I cry, though I have acknowledged the same to myself.

"Den he *mek* you sing—he *mek* you look stwait in his eyes—he mek you blenty dings, like you vos pelong mit him!"

"You are mistaken Captain, I simply try to please all my friends; don't I always sing for you?"

"Ya-a-s," he acknowledges, "but he go effry vere mit you. I neffar gets you no more."

"What nonsense! You've been much too busy with Mrs. Lefon to think of me."

"Oh," he cries delightedly, "you jallous ob her?"

"Of course," I answer, humoring his vanity.

"Den," much pleased, "if se dontd lofe dot Scotchman, se go mit me on de sail to nide—eh?"

"Certainly. I expected to ask for your company. This is Leap Year, you remember."

"Yas, me know," he blushes a rosy red.

"Why Captain," I cry in mischief, "one would imagine some lady had proposed to you."

"Hush!" he cries in alarm, "I shant dell you nottings! Me gone—goot-pye!" he seizes his hat and rushes forth, leaving me to finish my laugh alone.

How shall I describe my enemy's crestfallen look

when, in my coolest manner I inform him that I have an escort, or his indignant scowl when Peter's beaming face appeared?

Suffice it to say, the whole affair was charming. With music, moonlight and flirtation, who could be dull?

And that homeward walk—can I ever forget it?

Now, I cannot disguise the fact, that dear Peter is not a graceful walker. Having "tacked" a great deal through life, his gait, naturally, partakes of his nautical occupation, producing an uneven motion, more eccentric than beautiful. However, I possess the consoling knowledge that our appearance is striking; and that I am envied by more than one "female sister." As we walk homeward, deep in the discussion of "de moons ob Marse," Mr. Kieth passes with a conciliatory "good-night." The Captain, quick as thought, slips his fingers to my wrist.

"What do you mean?" I ask, as I withdraw my hand.

"Nottings," he returns, innocent of wrong. "Me just feel you pulse ven he go py, to see if he beat some faster dan odder time—see?"

"How dare you?" I cry in anger.

"Oh Mee Nelsonn!" he cries piteously, "Don't you vos cross mit me!"

"Do not touch me," I say in my sternest voice. "I cannot trust you."

To my mingled horror and amusement, he leans against the nearest fence, and cries like a baby.

"Hush, Captain!" I cry in alarm. "Come straight along, or we'll have the whole town looking on."

"Me, don'td gare! Me don'td gare!" he wails, 'You lofe me not—you hates poor me! poor me!"

"If you don't come along this minute, "I say, almost choked with laughter and mortification, "I will never speak a word to you again."

This awful threat moves him, but nothing human or divine can quiet his absurd cries. He follows me home, uttering such heart-rending screams of reproach aud entreaty that we become not only the laughing-stock of our party, but several respectable citizens, aroused from their slumbers, throw open their doors and windows to inquire anxiously, "What's that row? Is any body dead?" My feelings are better imagined than described; for, I have laughed and scolded so much, that my condition is only a trifle less hysterical than Peter's.

We reach home, and I fall upon the steps and laugh till I am positively weak.

"What's that infernal row?" growls Uncle from his bedroom window.

"You had better go, Captain," I manage to gasp.

"Neffar!" he returns firmly. "Here vill I stay all night till you say you goot friends mit me!"

"What's the matter with that blamed old fool?" tenderly inquires Uncle.

"Good-night, Captain, you may stay if you like, but I must go in."

"Oh, Mees Nelsonn! vy vill you leave me?"

"Because I'm sleepy—let go my dress!"

"Dear, scheet Mees Nelsonn—"

"Leave that cussed fool and go to bed!" yells my irate relative. "No decent woman would be gallivanting about at this hour!"

"Good-night, Captain," I say, struggling to free my skirts from his grasp.

"Oh, Mees Nelsonn!" he pleads, "say von leetle vord——"

"Come in, you jade!" Uncle screams, at the top of his voice. With a desperate effort, I free my skirts, rush in, and close the door. Peter howls a moment upon the steps, then slowly departs, making night hideous wlth his cries.

How we catch it next day! After exhausting his vocabulary of pet names, and abusing us for every thing under the sun, Uncle determines to leave M— and poor Auntie is ordered to pack instantly.

I regret that he goes in anger, but oh, so glad the visit is ended.

They left Friday morning, and Saturday, just as we are up to our eyes in house cleaning, de Captain enters with a package under his arm.

"Can me see you, von leetle minute?" he asks, a look of fell determination in his eye.

"Certainly," I answer. "Have a seat."

Instead of accepting the proffered chair, he lays the package upon my knee, saying resignedly:

"Me pring him all back already. You no lofe me —den me no keep de tings you gif me."

"Very well," I answer, biting my lip to keep from laughing. I open the package; there lies the birth-day and Christmas gifts I had given him along with several other things.

"This calendar and collar box, I will keep;" I say gravely, "but these other things are not mine,—I simply embroidered them for you—'twas all your own material, you remember, so 'twould be dishonest for me to keep your property." I refold the articles and hand them to him, then, taking my rejected presents, turn to leave the room.

Poor Peter throws himself at my feet, wildly clutches my garments, and begins his unique performance.

"Oh Mees Nelsonn I lofe you so ferry mooch! ferry mooch! Please don'td tek mine pooty tings away already! I ish meesable! meesable! Neffar, some more, vill I pe happy! Vot for you hates poor me? I lofe you mooch, so mooch!"

"Why Captain," I laugh, "you may have your pretty things back, if you'll only keep quiet."

"You gif dem to me?" he asks eagerly. "You lofe me some little bit?"

"Of course I do. Here, take your things, and don't be so foolish."

"Oh Mees Nelsonn, you ish so goot—I must gry some leetle bits. Just some leetle bits!"

"Not a bit," I laugh.

"But me ish so happy—me must gry leetle bits!"

"Then wait till I close the windows, or the neighbors will think you crazy"

But in spite of my efforts, he makes such a terrific row that Kieth and Kenneth, who are passing, stop to inquire if we have a madman in the house. My enemy enjoys the situation hugely, declaring it serves me right for deserting him.

Peter, presently, rushes past us, his face and beard wet with many tears, but a look of supreme happiness overspreading his moist countenance.

"Me so mooch happy!" he cries. "Me go home und gry some leetle bits more!"

"Poor old Peter!" I laugh.

"What did you quarrel about?" asks my enemy.

"You."

"Ah! How flattering," pensively stroking his moustache.

"He abused me, I suppose, and you were loyal enough to defend me. Hence—a quarrel."

"Don't flatter yourself! I only defend my *friends*."

"And we are so much *more* than friends. At any rate, the enemy was routed with great slaughter, and is willing for peace on any terms."

"He cant be too penitent—after getting us into disgrace. You know Uncle left in great wrath. I doubt his ever forgiving us."

"Poor girl! but that reminds me—you know he told me of your lost will?"

"Yes."

"Have you tried a mediumistic search?"

"No. I don't believe in mediums.

"Nevertheless, they possess strange power. I saw a girl at P——— last week, who will probably develope into a first-class medium. Suppose we pay her a visit?"

"Well, I may run down there next Friday; but why are you so anxious that I find the will?"

"What a question! Of course you must have your rights."

His conscience, I suppose, begins to prick him.

"You forget that my gain will be ——"

"Another's loss? No; but he is more able to work than you."

"Thanks. You have grown awfully considerate," I say scornfully, wondering if he has an axe to grind.

"Now, what under heaven do you mean?"

"You certainly understand as well or better than I."

"If you do not explain," he cries, as he catches my hands, "I shall kiss you!"

"Oh no!" I cry in terror.

"Hurry!" he exclaims. "Even my patience has a limit."

"Oh, you horrid wretch! Let me go!"

He holds me close, as he presses a long tender kiss upon my lips.

"My own!" he whispers.

"I am not," I cry, as I struggle for freedom. "I despise you! You are a mean, unprincipled ——"

"That will do," he says, sternly, as he withdraws his arm. "Go!" he gives me a little push, and a moment later, strides down the road whistling "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

I don't care! No, I am glad of it! Of course he knows that he is spending my money, and he must know that I understand it; then why pretend he does not? Yes, I am glad he is gone. I never liked him; and then pretending to love me—perhaps he was willing to marry me for the sake of easing his conscience—but love—bah! We would be miserable; for how can I respect him when I remember that horrid letter? Yes, 'tis better so. I will go to P—— next week, and make another effort to find the will. Oh how delightful it would be to get my money back, and how mortified he would feel if forced to return it! Yes, I am truly glad he is gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"There are more things in heaven,
And earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamed of in our philosophy."—*Shakespeare.*

NEXT week, true to my resolve, I visit the medium.

She is very young (barely sixteen), slight, and dainty looking. Like all her family, she is illiterate; and totally unversed in Spiritualism, Occultism, or even Magnetism.

She does not become entranced; she simply holds the pen while some other force writes the words.

Captain Schneider, who has known her family for years, says they are much astounded at Lula's power, but will not permit her to become a professional medium.

We converse on indifferent topics for some time, then I remark casually:

"I have lost something—can you help me find it?"

"I will try," she says obligingly," but only one spirit ever finds things for me, and she may not come to-night."

"I wish you'd try, for I am very anxious to find this object."

"What is it?" she asks.

I tell her about the will.

"Perhaps," she says, dipping her pen in the ink bottle, and holding it over a sheet of note paper,

" your Uncle may help us. You know his writing?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll try."

The pen begins to move; Lula still talks to me, merely keeping the pen upon the lines.

"Ah," she cries, looking down, "it is Mrs. D——! Mrs. D——— can you tell this lady's Uncle, she wishes to communicate with him?"

"Yes," writes the pen, then remains silent.

"Why does it stop?" I ask.

"She has gone to find your Uncle," explains Lula.

Now it begins again.

"Look!" says the medium. I draw my chair nearer and read, as the pen traces these words:

"DEAR NEL:

The will was thrown, by mistake, into the barrel of waste paper—it, in turn, was buried at the farther end of the garden, just beyond the chestnut tree. NELSON KIETH."

"Is it his writing?" they all ask.

"Yes," I return, much astonished. "May I keep the letter?"

"Certainly. Are you satisfied or shall I try again?"

"Perfectly satisfied—but I'd like to talk with Uncle Nelson if possible."

"He has gone," she says, "but may return later; though I can't promise you for certain."

Presently it moves again, this time in German.

"Why Captain," I cry, "this is surely for you—none of the rest of us speak German."

"So he ish!" says Peter, eagerly scanning each word.

"He ish mine foster mudder. Eh? Vot dot you say?" translating for our benefit. "De vomans I lofe ish in tanger, great tanger? Dell me quick in von hurry vot you means? Eh?"

"A tall fair woman threatens her life," writes the pen, always in German.

"Vot her name—eh?"

"Lillian Lefon."

"Dot ish lies! Mees Lefon ish fine vomans—ferry fine vomans! You ish not mine foster mudder—you ish lying speerits!"

"Good spirits never lie," continues the unseen force. "Hast thou forgotten, oh child, thy foster sister, with the tiny scar on her left ear—the garden you played in—the old sheep, Gretchen, who ate from thy hand—thy mother's miniature, which now hangs from thy neck——"

"Stop!" cries Peter. "You ish mine foster mudder! But tell me, how can I safe mine lofe? Can I do nottings?"

"You shall assist, but another will be more powerful. God bless you, my son—farewell, I am called—I see you always—farewell!"

Warning number three! What can it mean? How can the fair widow harm me? Of course I don't believe a word of it—but, why are three of us warned? Will my enemy really help to save me, or—what utter nonsense! 'Twas only a dream, and "dreams always go by contraries." The Captain is deeply troubled; though he says but little, I can see the message weighs heavily upon him. But the pen moves again, and I forget everything save the present.

"Do any of us know you?" asks Lula.

"No," is written in a graceful feminine hand. "I died years before you were born."

"Have you a special communication?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Margaret Nelson Kieth."

"My great-great-grandmother?" I ask in amaze.

"Yes. It is to you, Nelson Kieth, that I speak. You have made a great mistake; you are trifling not only with your own heart, but that of a good, noble man. Dissemble no longer, for he is worthy of your love."

"Noble?" I repeat, rather puzzled. "How about that offensive letter?"

"Find the will; explanations will follow."

"But, if I fail?"

"You shall not fail. Farewell. Be true to yourself; remember, your happiness rests with you alone."

"Stay one moment! Does he——"

"I am called—farewell!"

And to my infinite regret, the writing ceases, and the pen remains silent the remainder of our stay.

"Find the will," says my ancestress; and find it I will, if human industry, guided by spiritual instruction ever succeeds. I shall write to my lawyer this very night and have him make a thorough search. Fortunately, Alan Kieth gave instructions for the old place to be closed, saying that, as he would soon visit America, he preferred making his own arrangements concerning it. But he has not been near it, for I am sure they had just crossed over when we met him at Jacksonville.

How could my ancestress call him noble?

Was she Margaret Nelson Kieth, that high-born

dame whom I was taught to reverence? Might it not have been some mischief-making spirit? Of course spirits are like people; death cannot change our immortal souls. But why need I worry over any of it? "Whatever is, is right," and I am fatalistic enough to take what comes in a philosophic spirit.

Bidding good-night to the medium, I hasten to my boarding-house and write my letter. Peter still worries over his message, but I am too much occupied with other thoughts.

Unless Mrs. Lefon becomes insane, she will never so far forget her calm dignity, as to chase me with that murderous knife, so why worry over the impossible?

CHAPTER XIX.

"Make not thyself the judge of any man."—*Longfellow.*

I AM so anxious about the will that I am almost sick from suspense. I had telegraphed my lawyer for information, and am momentarily expecting an answer.

Do I believe the medium's tale? I hardly know; the writing was certainly my Uncle's, yet—if this prove true, what of the other messages? Is my enemy really worthy of my love, and will the fair widow attempt my life? One is as probable as the other!

Apropos of my enemy, I have not seen him lately. He and Kenneth are on the upper river collecting specimens of the Roseate-Spoonbill and White-Heron. Alan declared, on leaving, that he should sketch every pretty spot between this place and Okeechobee. I am forced, against my will, to acknowledge that he is not an idler, but a thorough and artistic student. He could be so nice if he would only—but why do I care? When I find the will—ah, there comes Peter with my telegram! With trembling fingers I open it, and read:

"Will found. Commence proceedings without delay. Will write Kieth. JOHN BROWNLOW."

"Ish he goot news?" asks Peter.

"Delightful! The will is found! Where is Bess? I must tell her of our luck."

"Oh se off some vere mit de boys. But dot vills —you ish reech now—you not vont to teach de school?" anxiously.

"Of course I'll finish the term. This is the first of May, and school closes the first week in June, does it not?"

"Yas, dot ish so. Den de Green corn dance—you vornt to see him?"

"Yes, indeed; have you heard when it is celebrated?"

"Yas; Billy Oceola vas in town yesterday, und he say dot he gomminse mit two moons from now."

"And you will give me a holiday?"

"Ob course se haf holitays. Dot ish nottings! Dem Jupeans, dey vornts to go—"

"But they are not here."

"Oh, dey ish comin'. Me haf a latter from Keit last nide; dey alride! Den, Mees Keyson—her mans not go; he in de voods two mont already. Und den—who else you vornt?"

"Why, we must have Syd."

"Syd ish no goot; he haf too mooch treeks already. Vell, you vornt him—he go. You vornt some moor vomans mit you?"

"No; are we not enough?"

"Yas; all me vont ish you!"

Notwithstanding their tiresome journey, our Scotchmen visit us the very evening of their return.

"It is refreshing to look at you!" exclaims Kenneth.

"Why?" asks our coquette.

"Why?" he repeats. "If you had not seen a

civilized man in a month of Sundays, would you not enjoy gazing at me?"

"That depends," she answers with a mocking laugh.

"You are terribly sun-burned; then the mosquitoes have been so attentive that your dearest friend could scarcely call you handsome."

"Why are you so happy?" asks my enemy.

"Because of my return?"

"Of course!" I return, scornfully.

"What else could cause that joyous expression?" he teases.

"The will is found!" I return, watching him closely.

"Let me congratulate you!" he extends his hand.

"Oh, you need not," I say in surprise; for he seems really in earnest. "I can hardly expect such a sacrifice."

"'Tis none, I assure you. I am glad—very glad of your success."

"I believe—you—really—mean—it!" I say in amaze.

"Why shouldn't I mean it?" he demands.

"Why, you know, the will leaves *everything to me,*"

"Well?"

"And *you* get *nothing!*"

"Nel, my poor girl, are you crazed? What *do* you mean?"

"You know very well that you took all my money—have you forgotten that horrid letter?"

"*I took your money?*" he repeats in surprise. "Pray explain how, and when."

We rise, and stare at each other in dumb amaze; then I walk quietly to my desk, find the obnoxious

letter, and hand it to him. He reads it slowly, then says:

"Well?"

"Well?" I cry indignantly. "It is *not* well! Can you deny writing *that?*"

"Certainly. I never saw it before in my life"

"What! are you not *Alan Douglas Kieth?*"

"Yes, that is my name—ah, I see! So *this* is the mysterious crime you've treasured against me. How exquisitely funny!"

He throws himself upon the sofa, and laughs immoderately.

"I am glad you are amused," I say in my stateliest accents. "*All* of us are not so merry under misfortune; but, perhaps the loss of a million is nothing to you."

But he laughs all the more, so I return to my seat and assume a look of stern dignity. What right has he to laugh at me—me, whom he has defrauded?

"You silly child!" he says at length. "Why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"Why *should* I? You knew it all along."

"Oh, how delicious!" with another laugh," I say, Kenneth, Miss Nel has been taking me for old cousin Alan! Isn't it jolly?" Then both of them laugh.

"How flattering!" exclaims Kenneth, "I'd sue her for slander."

"She richly deserves it," laughs my enemy.

"What do *you* mean?" I ask with dignity. "If you are not my cousin, who are you?"

"I am your cousin, considerably removed; but the old gentleman for whom you so kindly mistook me, is my fourth cousin. I am both his godson and

namesake. Now, do you not feel ashamed of your wretched conduct?"

"No, I do not! I know he is a horrid old wretch—"

"By no means; he is cranky, but, like all of the Kieths, has his good points."

"Good points indeed! And what, pray, are yours?"

"Long-suffering and forgiveness," he answers promptly. "While yours, little cousin, is to make a blunder, and stick to it."

"Yes, I always knew you were ungenerous!" I cry indignantly.

"And hateful?" teasingly.

"Yes!"

"And a 'mean, unprincipled, wretch?'"

"Yes, all that and much more! I wish you'd go!"

"Why," he answers gayly, "I've just begun enjoying myself."

"Go! My head aches!"

"Oh, well, you may go to bed. I can talk to cousin Bessie."

"I thought you said——"

"That I came for your society alone? You needn't believe all we say. Good-night, Miss Kieth; I hope you'll be more amiable at our next interview."

I go to bed, but cannot sleep. What an eventful day! I ought to be happy, but I am not. To think, after all, he is *not* my enemy! Oh how ashamed, how *mean* and *little* I feel! And he has been so kind and considerate, so tender and forgiving through all my terrible rudeness. He said they'd hurt me some day—those horrid little speeches—

and now they begin to sting in truth. Will I never forget it all? Oh how I wish he would go away, far away, where I'd never hear of him again —no I don't—for I miss him terribly when he is gone! Of course he will never forgive my blunder; and I—how can I ask him? Why are they having such a gay time, while I am here so utterly miserable? What does he care for my wretchedness? Just hear that laugh, and my poor head ready to burst. Oh dear! Will they never go? At last—thank heaven! What is he saying? "Tell your sister I will see her to-morrow." You are mistaken sir, for I shall look simply wretched after this headache!

CHAPTER XX.

"Sing, oh song of Hiawatha,
Of the pleasant days that followed,
Sing the mysteries of Modamin,
Sing the blessing of the cornfields!"—*Longfellow.*

TWO days of travelling over bad roads, a fierce tropic sun overhead, and nothing upon which to rest our weary eyes save an unbroken stretch of pine trees, palmettoes and white sand. True, an occasional bayhead relieves the monotony; but they, like angels' visits, are "few, and far between."

On we go, miles from any white settlement; for we are travelling to the famous "Big Cypress," a part of the much talked of Everglades.

The Seminoles are nomadic, moving their abodes to suit the hunting. Their women, now, as in the days of Columbus, till the earth with a crooked stick, and plant corn, pease, and other vegetables, while the braves look on approvingly.

At last, we reach their camp, a small village of palmetto houses, divided strictly into male and female lodgings; for the braves consider it debasing to associate too closely with women. The dance, which began before our arrival, seems rather a religious ceremony than a jollification.

A huge fire of pine knots, palmetto roots and cabbage logs had been lighted, and around this, a large circle, somewhat resembling a circus ring, had been

formed. Every man, woman, and child in camp danced round the sacred flame singing the monotonous "Ho! He! hi! He! Ho—he—hi!" which constitutes their highest vocal exercise.

The women are in holiday dress, and about their ankles are tied terrapin shells, filled with shot, small pebbles, old nails—anything to make a noise. The combined clatter of these unique ornaments and the horrible discord of their voices, produced a pandemonium which baffles description!

I notice several braves, who wear buckskins, are gay in feathers, beaded sashes and scarfes. They appear to be marshals; for, armed with long, wooden swords, they prick all delinquents on to duty. Woe to any poor squaw or tired picaninny who lags in the dance! There is no rest for the weary till this great rite is finished.

We join them awhile, singing their tuneless song; but cannot long endure the heat. The fire is constantly replenished, and the performance continues without variation. Round and round the poor wretches go, stopping for neither food nor slumber. Not a moment's rest is allowed them; not a drop of water passes their parched lips. On and on they go, till three days and nights are spent in this peculiar rite.

"Suppose we sketch that marshal"; says Mr. Kieth, "he is a splendid model."

They are, fortunately, too busy to observe us, for the Seminole is suspicious, and rarely allows himself to be photographed.

We make several excellent sketches, catching their free, unstudied attitude as they gyrate around.

The weary dance ends; and now, another curious rite begins. A small house, to the left of the circle,

has been stowed with well heated stones, and every particle of air excluded. A number of braves, entirely innocent of clothing, enter; and the door is shut.

For the next half hour, a dozen of the oldest men dance around the building chanting the same old song and mumbling prayers and incantations. Now the nude warriors appear, and are bled at the arms, legs and back. Immediately after bleeding they plunge into a pond of cold water, clothe themselves, and prepare for the feast.

This sweat-bath, unlike the dance, is optional. The young braves are persuaded, even urged to take it, but never forced. Women and children never indulge. Bleeding, they claim, lets out the tired blood producing a delightfully rejuvenating effect. I suppose we might term this part of the programme a Turkish bath—minus polite appointments.

Great kettles of green-corn, cow-peas, sofki, coffee, potatoes, etc., etc., have been spread upon the ground, and around these the crowd gathers. But first they must partake of the "vomit pot"—a broth made from the roots of certain herbs. They drink it directly from the pot—a large iron spoon going the rounds—then begins the nauseating sight of fifty vomiting Indians! Oh, how disgusting! It is soon over, however, and they eat as voraciously as a three days' fast would warrant.

Then, oh dear! how sleepy and tired they are! utterly worthless for the next few days.

Billy Fuel, who had lived several years among the whites and understood English well, showed us around the camp, explaining many of their customs.

The mother-in-law, he informs us, is by no means the despised creature of civilization, but is the

most powerful person in camp. Wonderful phenomenon!

A brave never takes his wife to *his* people; no, he must build his palmetto house close to his mother-in-law's, and remain forever after under petticoat rule!

Refreshing, isn't it, after so many howls from the more (?) civilized brethren?

Again, during any conjugal disturbance, should the wife be beaten or otherwise ill-treated, her family will protect her; the husband must speedily mend his ugly ways, or *hyepus**—for the settlement will suddenly become too hot for his health.

A brave, sometimes, with the consent of the Medicine-man, puts away his wife.

She has the same privilege; and either or both may marry again.

Polygamy is prevalent, but not the slightest blood relationship must exist between contracting parties. For this reason, a boy of eighteen often marries a woman of sixty and *vice versa* The race is strictly moral, guarding the purity of woman as a sacred trust. Go, O white man, and learn of thy ignorant red brother!

"And what is this?" I ask, as we walk through one of the houses.

"Oh," says Syd, lifting the circular piece of board, one side of which bristles with needle points, "this is their instrument of punishment.'

"Is it Billy?" asks Bess.

"Uh-huh," grunts our guide. Picaninny cry—squaw scratch him—see?" going through the motion.

"Why not switch him?"

"Switch no good—picaninny cry—what for? He

*Hyepus—go away.

bad—Squaw scratch him—bad blood squirt out—picaninny good again—beat him like dog—bad blood no get out—picaninny *holy-wogus** to hell!"

We return to the feasters, who, though they decline conversing, offer us food. We taste their sofki—a kind of starch—but do not enjoy it. They have no plates, eating from the pots in which the food is cooked. Knives and forks are unknown, the fingers supplying their place; while the large spoon, the only one used, begins at the eldest, and goes, in turn to the youngest member of the group.

"Do the squaws never wear anything on their heads?" I ask.

Billy gives a negative grunt.

"I suppose," remarks Kieth, "that old shawl or blanket they wear about their shoulders, is a remnant of the Mexican *reboza*."

"One might judge so," I return, "by the inevitable picaninny within."

"I especially admire the arrangement of their hair," laughs Bess.

"Vy," says Peter, "se got bangs, des like you."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I look like *that?*" pointing to a hideous old hag.

"Vell," returns Peter, enjoying her indignation, "se got long stwait bangs, und you got short kinky vons, like de niggar! Dot ish all de diffunse me see."

"Mr. Lindsey!" she cries, "I appeal to you for redress. The Captain has insulted me grossly!"

"Captain Schneider," cries Kenneth in a tone of great severity. "I demand an instant apology, or —pistols for two!"

*Holy Wogus—no good.

"Me not fight, und me not 'pologise," laughs Peter. "Vot for you not vear your hair like Mees Nelsonn?"

"Oh," with a pout, "she can dispense with bangs. If I had a low, broad forehead, and all of that wavy hair—besides, brunettes can afford a plainer style than we poor blondes."

We buy moccasins, leggins, a few buckskins and a little bead-work, then turn our faces homeward.

I am very glad we came, for though suspicious and uncommunicative, the Indians have treated us kindly, and given us much useful information.

They are a peaceful, honest race, with no aspirations above a shot-gun, and few disappointments of any kind. Having a justly rooted hatred against the United States government, they will accept nothing at its hands, receiving all agents in contemptuous silence. When an enterprising agent, regardless of cold looks and perfect silence (the Seminole will *not* speak on compulsion), forced himself into their settlement, they quietly waited for darkness to enwrap the earth, then "folded their tents like the Arabs, and as silently stole away." They will do it every time, so Uncle Sam may as well leave them alone.

Religious and philanthropic societies, too, have made, and are still making efforts in their behalf. Every few months, a box containing books, cards, clothing, etc., is received at M——— for distribution among the Seminoles. This is mistaken kindness. Few of the tribe can read, and those who can are proud to buy their own books.

They are honestly dealt with by the men with whom they trade, and still possess that feeling of independence impossible to an object of charity.

Our homeward journey is even more tiresome than the outward. The rainy season, fortunately, has not begun, or this excursion would have been impossible.

But the saw-grass seems higher, the sun hotter and the mosquitoes more vicious. We girls are utterly worn out, but nothing disturbs Mrs. Keyson's calm.

My enemy spends his time in sketching scenery and caricaturing our party. He has let me severely alone since he discovered my unlucky blunder. I suppose he thinks I should apologise; but how can I? If I begin, where shall I end? How was I to know that he was not my cousin? One more month and I shall leave Florida. We may never meet again, and I shall soon forget—can I, though? I feel that kiss always. Why can I not wipe it into forgetfulness? How foolish I am! Never mind, a few more rows with Uncle will change the current of my thoughts. Poor Uncle! His bark was ever worse than his bite

CHAPTER XXI.

"False friendship, like the ivy, decays and ruins the wall it embraces; but true friendship gives new life and animation to the objects it supports."—*Robert Burton.*

MY birthday being the twentieth of June, I determine to give a grand *fete*, which will serve as a farewell to our friends.

So I decide on a garden-party, and invite the entire neighborhood; even Mrs. Lefon.

The Captain, our Scotchmen and the Keyson boys have placed their services at our disposal, while Mrs. Keyson has kindly offered to relieve us of cake baking.

My pupils are delighted at the prospect of attending a "real grown folks' party," and I determine to devote much of my time to them.

Every one is so kind—I almost hate to leave them. Yet, I know we'd soon vegetate in this quiet place.

We work hard, and the grounds look lovely. Then my presents—I can't begin to describe them all!

Dear old Peter brought me a string of large, beautiful pearls.

"Dey vos mine mudder's," he says, "und no udder vomans shall effar vear dem. Vill you—for mine poor sake?"

"Of course, I shall, you dear, good man!"

Suppose his mother *was* not as good as she might have been, shall I refuse this gift from my good old

friend? No, had she been twice as bad, I will always remember her kindly for Peter's sake.

"You ish goot!" he exclaims delightedly. "Me lofe you mooch! Ferry mooch!"

Later on Kenneth brings me a lovely bracelet, and about noon I receive a package and note from Mrs. Lefon, who begs that I will wear her gift that evening.

"Oh!" exclaims Bess, shaking out the soft folds of a dainty silk scarf. "What an exquisite shade! And it just matches your other trimmings! Of course you will wear it."

"I suppose I must;" I reply reluctantly, "but I wish she had not sent it."

"Why?" throwing it around my neck.

"Oh, I do not know! I have a horror of her."

By sunset everything is in readiness, and we begin our personal adornment. Our dresses are white, Bessie's trimmings of blue, mine yellow. I twine my dark locks to the top of my head, and arrange Peter's pearls tastefully among them.

Kenneth's bracelet is upon my arm, and I am trying Mrs. Lefon's scarf about my throat, when Syd calls: "I say, Miss Nel! Here is another birthday gift. Wish I was a girl! I don't see why they should get everything! Why, nobody knows when I have a birthday. I don't think it's fair!"

Who could have sent it! As I open the tiny package a brilliant diamond flashes across my dazzled eyes. Ah, here is a note.

"DEAR NEL:

Wear this to-night to please ALAN."

I slip it on my finger.

What a beauty! Shall I wear it? Of course; it will please him—then it is so exquisite!

But, if I wear it, what then? Is it simply a birthday token, or does it mean more? Will he not think me anxious, that I am meeting him half-way? No, on second thoughts, I will not wear it. If he likes, he can ask about it, and I will tell him—"there is the rub" what shall I tell him?

But our guests are arriving, so I return the ring to its box, and hasten to the grounds. Gorgeous Japanese lanterns swing gently from every available limb, shedding a soft, mellow light over the garden, and discloses, to those inclined, many quiet nooks for *tete-a-tete*. Chairs, sofas and rustic benches are scattered around—not too near together—for the accommodation of young and old. The elder guests avail themselves of these, and sit in groups, enjoying many a bit of gossip; but the younger couples wander here, there and everywhere in search of variety.

The organ, "a blaze of lights, and breathing with perfume," occupies a central position, and the Captain, contrary to his usual custom, plays whenever asked, delighting us all with his bright, joyous music.

Tears of joy sprang to the dear, dear fellow's eyes when he saw his pearls amid my hair; but I could scarcely understand Mrs. Lefon's look on beholding her gift. She thanked me in her calm, cool way for wearing it, but a triumphant look shone in her eyes and a hard, little smile appeared upon her lips as she remarked:

"You will be leaving us soon

"Yes, in two days."

"So soon?" with a strange look.

"I hope so," I answer, wondering why she stares so strangely. 'Twas a strange look—triumph, not

unmixed with remorse. But I have no time to think of her, for I am wanted everywhere.

"Where is my ring?" demands Alan Kieth, attentively regarding my hand.

"In my room."

"You do not mind wearing other people's gifts!" he exclaims angrily, as he looks with disdain upon my numerous adornments.

"They are from my friends."

"And what, pray, am I?"

"Why, you are my—yes children, I am coming.'

"Let the children go to h—heaven! Can you not spare me a moment?"

"Not now."

"Will you at all?"

"Perhaps—if you are nice. Now come and help me play with them."

We start a game, but I am soon whisked off to the organ and forced to sing, though I am scarcely able. Such curious sensations are creeping over me; of course I am not sick, yet, I feel so miserable.

I force myself to be gay, while all the time I am longing to lie down in peace. I feel that something terrible is about to happen; yet I must go on to the bitter end.

I have no clear recollection how we get through with supper; I only know that Alan and the Captain help me greatly. Alan sees my wretchedness and shields me when possible.

"What is the matter?" he asks gently.

"I do not know. I am utterly miserable! Do I show it much?"

"Not much. I am afraid you have worked too hard. Can you not rest a little?"

"Come Miss Nel!" cry a lot of little folks. "You must play 'drop the handkerchief.'"

I give a weary sigh and start forward.

"Do not go!" exclaims Alan. "You are not able."

"Oh I must!"

"Oootan tum too, Mifter Tief!" cries a tiny girl. So he laughingly takes her hand, and joins the circle.

"Run, Miss Nel! You've got it!" cries one of the children.

I pick up the handkerchief, and begin a mad race after the misguided youth who had so unkindly flattered me with this attention. My head feels as if it would split, and the odor of the flowers is overpowering! The heavy perfume of night-blooming jasmine is everywhere; will nothing shut it out? I can scarcely breathe; I loosen the scarf at my throat and rush on—on—on! Ah—I almost have him, when all turns dark, and I fall—but no—someone catches me! I feel those strong arms close about me, but the voice seems far distant that says tenderly:

"Poor girl! This is too much for her."

Some one brings a glass of water, and I open my eyes. I still lean upon his breast, for I am too weak to move.

"I could not help it," I say faintly. "Could you —manage to get—me—to the house?"

"Directly," returns Alan. "Lie still a moment."

He half carries me into the house, and places me upon the sofa.

"Send Bess," I gasp.

"Are you comfortable?" he asks arranging my pillow.

"No—yes—I want to tell you how awfully sorry——"

"Nonsense! you could not help it. Lie still; I will be back directly."

He will not understand that I am sorry for the past; and he may never know, for I shall certainly die if they do not hurry.

How my head aches! My brain is on fire, and a wave of deathly nausea sweeps over me! When will they come? Ah, at last! Peter, Kenneth, Alan and Bess—all looking so anxious.

The Captain feels my pulse and shakes his head.

"Ve got her to beds ride avay quick in von hurry," he says decisively. "Se sick ferry mooch. Kiet, you kintle de fire und heat blenty vorters—you, Meester Lindsey go sent dem peoples home; dis house must be quiet. Mees Bessie. me help you get her to ped."

"But Captain," she begins, "I had better have one of the ladies——"

"You do vot I say!" he says sharply." You not know nothings!"

I am too miserable to know or care how I am put to bed—I only know they get me there—and am thankful. Later on they souse me into a great tub of hot water and wrap me snugly, compelling me to drink great quantities of orange leaf tea; but I have only a vague, dream-like memory—every thing is shadowy. Then comes a blank—I have no idea how long I tossed about—not exactly unconscious—just too miserable to see or hear any thing—so utterly wretched all the time! Sometimes the conversation about me reached my dull ears, and I tried to make sense, but the effort was too great—I could only lie there and wonder vaguely what it was all about.

One day, when they thought me unconscious, I

heard Peter sob. I tried to ask him what was the matter but could not.

"She is sinking rapidly," says a strange voice.

"Vill se die?" sobs Peter. "Yes. She will hardly last till evening—unless, indeed, some powerful change takes place."

How terrible! Why should I die? I am so young so rich and—why should I be snatched away from all I love? What good will the money do me now—and there is my enemy—dear fellow how nice he's always been—and how sorry he'll be! Then to think he will never know how sorry I am—but perhaps I can tell him now—before I go—anyhow—

I open my eyes, and look feebly about. A tall, dark man bends over me.

"Are you the doctor?" I ask faintly.

"Yes."

"Where is Bess?"

"Asleep."

"Don't wake her. I want—are you sure I will die?"

"I fear so, poor child."

"Then—I—must see—Allan," I gasp. I am awfully tired, but I must see him before the end. Peter goes out, and soon returns with the poor fellow; then goes out again, softly closing the door. How sad they both look! Do they care so much?

"Do you know?" I ask faintly, "that I must—die?"

He covers his face with both hands, but says nothing.

"I could not go without your forgiveness," I continue. "I was so unjust—said such mean, spiteful things; but I have been awfully sorry. And your ring—I did want to wear it—I wanted to be sweet to you—but now—it is too late."

"Nel," he cries passionately, "do not waste your precious strength on trifles!"

"And I loved you all along;" I confess, "even before I discovered you were not my enemy."

"Dear love," he says, tenderly kissing my poor, thin hands, "you must not leave me."

"I do not want to go; but what can I do?" I cry piteously, "life would be *so sweet* with you."

"You shall not die!" he exclaims passionately.

"I am so young," I murmur, "and life is so beautiful! Kiss me once, dear love—as you did——"

He takes me in his arms, and kisses me tenderly, almost reverently, then lays me gently among the pillows.

"Alan," I whisper, "I want your ring—your ring. Put it on my finger dear, so I may feel near you—even—after death."

He hunts on the dressing table and places it on my third finger—where it should have been all along.

"Nell," he says resolutely, "*will* with all your might—with your very *soul*—to *live!*"

"But Alan, the doctor said I *must* die."

"Love is mightier than Death!" he cries. "Help me darling to fight the destroyer! Live, Nel, for *my sake!*"

He looks intently at me, and begins stroking my hands with a light, circular motion.

"Sleep!" he commands.

"Don't leave me!" I plead.

"I will not," he says soothingly. "Sleep, sweetheart."

I smile at him through my half closed eyes.

Such a delicious langour is stealing over me—how sweet to have him with me to the very end.

I suppose this is death, but I do not mind it the least bit—it is—heavenly!

CHAPTER XXII.

"Woman is a miracle of divine contradictions."—*Michelet.*

"SHE told you that!"

Bessie's voice has a far off sound; perhaps I am in the spirit world, and catch only the echo.

"Yas," answers dear old Peter, "und se cwy, und wing her hand und say se sorry—*tormenjus* sorry!"

"And you?" she questions.

"Me dells her to go avay for always oudt of mine sight! Neffar, no more I vornt to see her some more already!"

He gives an angry snort, and I open my eyes.

"Bess!" I call feebly.

"Oh you darling!" she cries, running to my side. "She is all right, Captain."

Peter comes in, his dear, old face one broad smile.

"Yas, se alride!" he announces, eyeing me closely. "Se goot gearl—mooch goot!" rubbing his chubby hands in pleasure.

"Have I been ill?" I ask, bewildered.

"Have you been ill?" laughs Bess. "What impertinence! Here we've been nearly *wild* about you—why if it hadn't been for the Captain, you'd have died before the doctor got here!"

"But Bess—" I begin "what's the matter——"

"Hush dot talking!" commands Peter. "Me get him goot brot.' And he bustles out.

"Why must I——"

"Hush!" says Bess, "Peter is head nurse, and he'll murder me if any thing goes wrong; so shut your eyes, baby mine, and wait for your broth."

I obey, wondering vaguely what it all means. The broth is good, and Peter and Bess rattle on in the most nonsensical way. They are wildly gay about something—but won't let me talk much. Never mind—I'll retaliate, some day. But it is delightful to be petted; so I lie there and smile indulgently at Peter's funny talk and Bessie's merry laughter.

Presently, they think me asleep and cease talking. He steals softly out, and she brushes away the flies. Why must all sick people be fanned? What a trouble to the nurse, and how tired her poor arms must get! Nothing but brush—brush—brush! What is the matter with me, anyhow, and why will they not tell me? It is something catching, for I smell carbolic acid. Oh horrors! can it be smallpox? I look at my hands very carefully; no, they are smooth and white. What, then—ah! memory slowly awakens; that awful, sickening feeling which made me faint——

"Bess," I ask, as I open my eyes "What day is this?"

"Why, Baby, I thought you were asleep! This, Miss Kieth, is Thursday."

"The day after our *fete?*"

"No, dear child; a week later. You have been very ill, but will do nicely now, if you obey orders. So shut your eyes and go to sleep. I shall answer no more questions."

I shut my eyes, and begin to think. I have a vague, dream-like recollection of being fussed over by Bess, Kenneth, de Captain and Alan; of intoler-

able pain and deadly nausea—but nothing is clear.

Oh, well, I am too weak to worry over these dim shadows; they will all come in time.

I do little more than eat and sleep for the next few days—Peter and Bess still my devoted slaves.

Our Scotchmen call many times, supplying me daily with fresh flowers and game.

Strange, I've heard no female voices. Have my lady friends forgotten me, or are they afraid of the contagion? I asked Bess the other day, but got no satisfaction.

Alan asked yesterday when he might see me, but I said positively not until I could dress; for it is so confusing to receive in bed. Of course I do not mind dear, old Peter—he has been just like a father to me—but the others must wait.

. . . . . .

Bess has told me all! How Mrs. Lefon sent me that scarf, knowing it was alive with *yellow-fever microbes!* Sent it purposely, hoping that I would contract the dread disease! And how, when they thought me dying, she confessed her crime, and begged Peter to forgive her.

"It was jealousy;" says Bess, "she hoped, by your death to gain his affections. But remorse overcame her, and now, he swears he will never see her again!"

"Where is she?"

"She went North immediately, and will probably stay there!"

"And the scarf?"

"Is burned."

"How did you discover the disease?"

"Dear old Peter suspected it immediately, and his prompt treatment was just the thing; for the

doctor, (we telegraphed to Jacksonvile for one) on his arrival, simply continued it, and finally cheered us with the information that you would die, unless a miracle took place."

"Then, how am I here?"

"Alan Kieth performed the miracle!"

"O-o-o-h!" I say slowly, my mind going back to that awful night. "What did he do?"

"Do you remember nothing of your last meeting?"

I do not answer, so she continues:

"Well, you asked to see him, told him you were properly sorry for your past meanness, I suppose, (he has never mentioned the matter) and when the others returned you were fast asleep, your hand lovingly clasped in his."

"Well?"

"The doctor said 'twas a clear case of hypnotism—and that you owed your life to Alan."

"How strange!" I cry. "The warning was true, after all—Mrs. Lefon *did* attempt my life, and the Captain and Alan *did* save me! Did either of them remember my dream?"

"Yes. Alan spoke of it several times, and Peter was hopeful all along, because his 'foster mudder' had promised that he should assist in saving you."

"Dear old Peter! But, have none of your lady friends been near you?"

"Dear child, the whole town ran away from the fever! Peter and the Scotch boys are our only true friends."

"How mortifying! But, was there much danger?"

"No. They were only scared. Your system was ripe for any disease, or you would never

have taken it. We, who nursed you night and day, have not been at all affected. Here, it is time for your quinine. And now, you had better rest."

I may rest my body, but my mind is in a tumult. To think of owing my very life to my enemy! The man I have scorned and insulted ever since we met; the dear, good, uncomplaining fellow, so handsome and gifted! How can I ever face him? Then, that awful deathbed scene—does he remember it? How dreadful! Why did I not have the decency to die? No, I am glad I did not; but what shall I do? Then, there is his ring; shall I return it? No, I dare not! And he is coming to-morrow! Oh what a pickle! How I wish—but what is the use—fate always fulfills herself.

. . . . . .

I put on my pink tea-grown, and am thankful to see that I am quite presentable; a trifle pale, perhaps, but that is necessary to the *role* of invalid.

The gate slams—I hear Kenneth's laugh, and the Captain's voice, so brace myself for the encounter.

"Good-morning, Miss Kieth," says Kenneth, shaking hands.

"I believe," says Alan, looking searchingly into my eyes, "you've been well enough to see us long ago."

"'I deny nothing and admit nothing!'" I cry, trying to avoid his gaze.

'Twas all pride," explains Bess. "She fancied she did not look so bewitching as when you last met—"

"Our last meeting was entirely satisfactory;" says my enemy with a quiet smile," though I have no idea what she wore."

"They say I must thank you for my life," I say shyly.

"The Captain did far more than I," he returns modestly.

"No!" cries Peter, "you haf more power; me do vot I can, but you safe her life! Se die. but for you. Se pelong to you, alvays!'

"Why, Captain," I say, "Bess says you did *everything.*"

"I do effry ting but safe you; dot he do. You belong mit him! Yas, me villing—mooch villing! It ish nottings—nottings at all! Goot-bye; me know young folks vornt to talk lofe—me go!" And out he rushes before I can stop him.

Oh, that the earth would open and swallow my blushing face! It does not, though; it never does when we most ardently desire it.

"A sensible old chap!" remarks Kenneth. 'He knows when he is 'a crowd.'"

"He did not wait for even a hint," laughs Alan.

"Any insinuations?" asks Kenneth. "Bess and I had just as soon perambulate."

"You are mistaken," returns Bess. "I have bread to bake; the fire must be started this minute."

"Then, I will assist," he rises with alacrity.

"Do not go!" I beg.

"I must," she returns. "And Nel, I may as well tell you that Kenneth and I are——"

"Oh Bess, do you mean——"

"Yes, she does," laughs Kenneth, placing his arm about her. "And I am just awfully happy!"

"I am so glad!" I cry, giving him my hand.

"Thank you, little sister," he says, as he kisses me affectionately.

"And now," says Alan, as they depart, ",it is my turn."

"What do you mean?" I falter.

"I want a kiss, of course! Am I not a model of patience?"

"No!" I cry, putting out both hands to prevent him.

"Nonsense, Nel! You know—you know you are mine—heart and soul! Have you forgotten this?" touching his ring.

"Oh!" I cry, wild with shame, "why didn't you let me die? I was *crazed* with fever—how could I know what I was saying?"

He drops my hands and looks grave.

"Do you mean that I mistook your ravings?" he asks coldly. "You care *nothing* for me?"

"Of course you did!" I say, lying glibly.

A look of stony firmness settle slowly over his face. He takes his hat, and says, with chilling politeness:

"I bid you good-morning, Miss Kieth," then walks in dignified silence towards the door.

Shall I let him go? I look longingly at him, but his face is turned steadily from me. Surely he will look around! Why was I so contrary, when all the time—ah! he has reached the door—no I cannot give him up!

"Alan!" I cry, starting towards him.

He turns and retraces his footsteps.

"Well?" he says coldly.

"Don't go—*please!*"

"Why not?" dryly.

"Because because——"

"Because what?" his eyes begin to twinkle.

"I was fibbing," I say desperately, for he will not

help me one particle. "I do love you devotedly!" I cry, throwing my arms around his neck.

"I know it," he laughs indulgently. "And now you wish me to set the day?"

"I suppose you must," resignedly, "for I will not."

"Nel," he says, as he holds me close, "you are the sweetest, meanest, most enchanting little torment in the world!"

THE END.

CONCHITA;

A MEXICAN ROMANCE,

BY "MEG."

CHAPTER I.

THE hot summer day is just ending, and the departing sun-god sheds his last, fiery rays over a scene of tropical loveliness.

In the midst of a grove of feathery cocoa palms, stands a picturesque flat-roofed house, with the open courtyard and quaint little balconies, so common in Mexico. Large *poncianas*, literally covered with pink, scarlet, white and yellow blossoms, many brilliant cacti, verbenas, geraniums, and a number of flowering vines fill the air with fragrance.

In an airy apartment, the long jalousies of which open upon the balcony, a man reclines upon a willow invalid-chair.

A casual glance shows that his life is fast ebbing away. His surroundings are refined, even luxurious, and bespeak both wealth and culture.

As the clock strikes six, he opens his eyes and calls, "Conchita! Conchita!" This call is immediately repeated by a grey parrot perched on the back of his chair.

"You here, Poll?" he says. "Did I not send you to your own house, for swearing?"

"Poor Poll! Poor Poll!" croaked the artful creature, holding up one foot to hide her pretended tears. "Poll so sorry—she promise to swear no more. Poll love her master—kiss and forgive!" She flies down and gives him a little peck upon the lips.

Just then, through the open window, walks a young girl of seventeen summers. Her glorious dark eyes, fine brows and curling lashes, rippling black hair, and clear, white skin, combined with a slender, well developed figure, produce a charming whole. Her soft, clinging white robe, tiny, high-heeled slippers, and graceful lace mantilla, are well in keeping with her pure, stately beauty.

With a loud cry of "Conchita! Conchita!" the the parrot flies across the room, and after a little peck on each cheek (the usual Spanish salutation) settles herself upon the young girl's shoulder.

Lightly kissing her father, she hands him a letter.

He gave a sigh of relief as he read its contents.

"A few more days," he murmurs, "and my mind will be at rest. Little daughter, you may read this; it is from my most valued friend, and concerns your future."

Wondering greatly, she took the letter and read:

"NEW YORK, June 5th, 1865.

DEAR OLD FRIEND:

Yours of May 10th just to hand.

I will be with you as soon as steam can take me. Can arrange very well for the little girl, but hope sincerely, it will be unnecessary. Keep up a brave heart, and don't expect me till you see me.

As ever, your friend, ERNEST GREYSON."

"But what does it all mean, Papa?" turning her

perplexed eyes upon him. "Who is the 'little girl,' and what arrangement is to be made for her?"

"Dear child," he answers, gently stroking one of her slender hands, "your father knowing he can live but a short while, wrote, asking a trusted friend to care for his little blossom when he must leave her. Don't you understand, my darling?"

"Oh, it can not be! It *must* not be!" she sobbed. "God is too good to take you from me. And, Papa, may not the doctor be mistaken? I am sure you look better to-day—say, dear Papa, do you not feel stronger?"

He smiled faintly, shaking his head.

Poll, unable to understand the situation, looks on in amaze; gathering, finally, that Conchita is in distress, she shows her sympathy by raising her voice in a most piteous wail.

"There, there, 'Chita," says her father, "dry your tears and quiet poor Poll. You know, child, I could not possibly live always. I am sure, you would not wish me to stay, suffering as I do."

With a strong effort, she controls her emotion, and, with the screaming parrot still perched upon her shoulder, leaves the room.

CHAPTER II.

FRANCIS MERLE, while still quite young, formed a romantic attachment for a beautiful Mexican *Senorita,* whom he met one winter in Havana. He first saw Conchita Poyo at a gay fancy ball, fell desperately in love, and followed her to Mexico, vowing that nothing should part them. She, at first was a little frightened by his vehemence, then pleased, and finally captivated. At last she promised, "If Papa consents, I will marry *Senor* Merle."

"Papa," after examining into the family record and bank account of the young man, yielded his consent on condition that they reside in Mexico.

Frances, being very much in love, willingly consented.

Papa Poyo presented them with a pretty little home on the gulf coast, and an airy summer retreat among the mountains; a refuge when the long, rainy season set in.

After two years of almost perfect bliss, the young wife died, in giving birth to her tiny namesake.

The bereaved husband, almost crazed with grief, left his child with her maternal Aunt, *Donna Castro,* and roamed over many lands in search of distraction.

Finally, a longing for rest, brought him once more to his southern home.

Little Chita, now six years old, soon learned to love "Papa" dearly.

Her cousin Alfonso, who had, hitherto, been her constant companion, felt a little jealous that so much of the affection he had formerly received should now be given to another. But the little lady explained matters by saying, "Don't you see, 'Fonso, I must love my Papa heaps and heaps! 'Cause I am all he has, and *your* Papa has you, and Auntie, and me, and lots of others."

"Well," answers the boy, gravely, "you may love him all you want to. But don't forget, 'Chita, you have promised to be my wife, some day—when we are grown."

"Certainly not," she answers firmly. "But don't you think, 'Fonso, 'twould be better to ask my Papa's consent? I heard Auntie say *your* papa asked for her."

"Perhaps so," he answers, "I shall ask him right now, *this minute*, if *you* wish it."

Hand in hand, they go in search of "Papa."

"Uncle," says 'Fonso solemnly, "Conchita and I want to marry when we are big like you. I come to ask your consent. Do you object?"

Mr. Merle laughed, and patting each of their heads, promised to raise no objections, if, at the end of a dozen years, they were still of the same mind.

"We will never change," they declared.

So he dismissed them with the wise admonition, "to be good children, and avoid all lover's quarrels."

Mr. Merle, after returning home, devoted much time to his little daughter. He would neither send her to school nor employ a governess, but determined to teach her himself.

She was a bright little thing, and easily learned all lessons assigned her. Then came the delightful pleasure of sitting on Papa's knee and listening with bated breath to his vivid descriptions of foreign lands. But most she loved to hear of his native city, New York.

"And why," questions the little fairy, "did you never go back to see your relations?"

"Because pet," your papa has no relatives, that is, no near ones."

"And no friends?" she persisted.

"Only one."

"When did you see him last?"

"Just before I came home."

"And has he any little girl, like me?"

"No, but he has a niece, several years older, who lives with him."

"Has she a mama?"

"Yes, she has a mama. Now run and play."

So years rolled on, father and daughter becoming fonder of each other every day.

He gave her a thorough English education, overlooked her miscellaneous reading, and taught her to sketch with a bold, free hand.

They were inseparable; if he rode, she kept by his side, firmly seated on her own little pony, and would pace, gallop or even run to keep up with "Papa." He never walked, read, sketched or enjoyed any occupation without her.

Alfonso still claimed much of her time, speaking often of their future marriage.

Their parents smiled, but said nothing, thinking it a very good arrangement.

Mr. Merle, however, wished his daughter to see more of the world before marriage; and, knowing

his days were numbered, had written to his friend Ernest Greyson, asking him to come immediately, and assume the care of his ere-long orphan child.

He had settled his earthly affairs, "put his house in order," and craved only to see this life-long friend, before going to his eternal rest.

The letter, received in our opening chapter gave him that hope.

CHAPTER III.

"CONCHITA, don't you hear some one coming? Look through the window, child—surely I am not mistaken."

"Yes, Papa, a man is coming up the tamarind avenue, on horseback; but 'twill be some time before he reaches the house. Shall I call Manuel to take his horse?"

"Certainly. I am sure it is Ernest, for he has had ample time for his journey."

She leaves the room, to give a few instructions, and, five minutes later, stands on the balcony, greeting their visitor.

"You are my father's friend?" she asks, looking timidly into his deep gray eyes.

"I am," answered the handsome stranger. "May I see him?"

"Yes; this way, please. He has fretted greatly for you." She conducts him to a cool, shady apartment, where the sufferer lies, propped up among snowy pillows.

"Thank God, that you have come at last!" exclaimed Mr. Merle as he feels the close, firm pressure of Earnest Greyson's hands. "I have prayed earnestly to see you once more—before—my—death."

"Let us hope, my dear fellow, that the case is not so bad," says Earnest cheerfully.

Mr. Merle only shook his head, and turning to Conchita said:

"My dear, show Mr. Greyson to his room. I am sure he is hot and dusty."

With a "Follow me, please," she leads him to a large, airy room, the very appearance of which, filled the weary traveler with a sense of repose.

"If you need anything," she continues, "call one of the servants. We have tea at six," and, with an "*adios*" she retires.

"How perfectly delicious!" cried Earnest Greyson, dropping into a large easy rocker. "This tropical heat certainly makes one very indolent. So, my fair conductress is poor Francis' daughter. The 'little girl' I am to care for. I wonder what my adorable sister will say when I return with such a beauty? The girl will certainly upset some of her schemes, unless, indeed, she is put in short dresses and consigned to the nursery. Ah, well, there's no use fretting till trouble really comes," with which comforting reflection, he fell asleep, and feels much refreshed when 'Mannel appears to announce the evening meal.

Many varieties of fruit graced the table—pine-apples, guavas, mangoes, sapadilloes, sour-sops, bananas, Spanish-limes, Avocado-pears, etc., etc., mingled with brilliant tropical flowers, and soft green foliage.

Earnest, who was unacquainted with most of these southern fruits, had to content himself with very simple fare.

Conchita, who presided with ease and grace, was much distressed that their visitor enjoyed so few of the Mexican dainties set before him.

She resolved that, during his stay, their bill of fare should be more American..

The meal finished, she proposes showing him over the grounds.

"This," she says, as they enter a vine-clad summer house," is my special property. Is it not a fairy bower?"

"It is, indeed, and here" stooping to examine a night-blooming cereus, "I see a long list of fairy visitors."

"Yes, and if you observe the first date, you can form some idea of the age and growth of the plant. But come let me show you elsewhere."

On she led him—through great, feathery fern-trees, gorgeous foliage plants; past rippling fountains, sprinkling flowers of many hues; dainty orchids, clinging to the rough trunks of stately palms; and down the white shell walk to the tiny lake, whose clear waters so perfectly reflect the brilliant tinting of a tropic sky.

On they roam, till the lengthening shadows warn them to return.

Next day, the two old friends have a long talk about Conchita's future; Ernest promising to become her guardian, and, as nearly as possible, fill her father's place.

"You know, dear friend, that my own life has not been happy, but I shall try in every way, to shield her from danger."

"I know you will. But, promise me one thing—that you will not permit my poor child to marry early. Her cousin, Alfonso Castro, and herself, formed some childish engagement years ago, but I don't think their dispositions at all suited—at any rate, don't let them marry till she is old enough to decide for herself."

"I promise," returned his companion, bitterly.

"I, of all others, should know the misery of a hasty marriage."

"Ah, you are not rid of her yet?"

"No, and fear I never shall be. She was in Paris when I heard last, but travels considerably."

"My poor friend! and you so young. Why you are only thirty-five——"

"Thirty-four, last March. Much too young for the miserable years before me—but let us speak of something more agreeable."

They talked of their school days, when Earnest, quite a youngster, regarded his older friend as little less than a god; of the many "jolly larks" they had enjoyed, foreign lands they had visited and odd people they had met.

Greyson was a pleasant companion, and for a little while the sick man rallied; but one morning, while quite alone with his daughter, Francis Merle dropped peacefully into his last sleep.

She, poor child, had never looked on death, and thinking 'twas only a faint, hastened to call help; and could hardly believe it, when Mr. Greyson tenderly assured her that "Papa" was in heaven.

Though completely overcome, she would not annoy him with her grief but shutting herself in her own room, would see no one but "Auntie."

As Senora Castro's husband had long been dead, and her son was now absent, the entire responsibility of the funeral fell on Greyson. 'Twas well he so thoroughly understood Spanish; for, excepting Conchita, none of the household spoke English.

Two days after this sad event, Conchita and he left for New York.

Senora Castro had anxiously begged to keep her

niece in Mexico, but Mr. Greyson kindly, but decidedly, refused.

'Chita's parting from the good lady was filled with many tears and caresses, and a whispered, "Be sure you keep your heart for my poor boy, dearie."

"Poor Poll," of course could not be left, so was securely housed in a pretty cage. She objected strongly to such treatment, promising loudly to "be a good girl and not swear."

CHAPTER IV.

"AND this is New York?" asks Chita, as their steamer nears the pier. "What a very, very large place it must be."

"It is," returned her guardian, "but you can not see a third of it from here. I'll take you some day to the top of old Trinity, where you'll get a much finer view."

No sooner did the tide of passengers begin to leave the boat, than the loud, distracting noise of hackmen, draymen, porters, each recommending his hotel or vehicle, commenced with all its fury.

Conchita, totally unaccustomed to such commotion, was terribly bewildered. But her guardian, quite at home in this pandemonium, soon had herself and belongings, Poll included, comfortably settled in a cab, and instructed the driver to take them to "No. — Fifth Avenue."

Soon they reach a handsome brownstone front, and the driver, springing from his seat, rings the doorbell. The door is opened, in a few minutes, by a liveried servant, who bows low, on seeing his master.

"Glad to see you back, sir," he said, beginning at once to gather up their luggage.

"Thank you Simpson," returned his master. "Take those things to the morning room, and ask Mrs. Paulding to meet us there. Come, my dear," assisting 'Chita from the carriage, "let me welcome you to your new home. I sincerely hope you will be happy in it."

"Yes," screams Poll, at the top of her voice, "you must be happy!"

"Ah, you termagant!" laughs Greyson, "I don't know what my sister will say to you."

"I will not curse!" she croaks, as they enter the sitting room.

Here they find Mrs. Paulding, a rather stout, though terribly dignified lady, dressed in the latest fashion.

She kisses her brother coldly, then, turning to 'Chita surveys her insolently, remarking sarcastically, "So, this is the 'little girl,' the young *infant* you wished me to care for? really, my dear brother, you are in need of *spectacles*."

Nevertheless, she extends her plump white hand for the "young infant" to press, but steps back in indignant amaze when Poll, now perched on her mistress's shoulder, stretches out one foot, saying in Spanish, "Polly too! Poor Poll!"

"Earnest!" thundered his sister in awful accents, "do you expect *me*, a Christian woman to live in the house with that thing?"

"Certainly, Madam. However, we can discuss that subject later; just now, I should be obliged if you would show Conchita to her room."

"Conchita! What a heathenish name! No; I will ring for Louise."

"Conchita was my mother's name," says our heroine, her dark eyes flashing defiantly, "and I would thank you to be a little more respectful to her memory."

Fortunately, Louise, the maid, appeared at this crisis, and on receiving the order, conducted Conchita to her apartment. It greatly resembled a nursery, for Mrs. Paulding, like her brother, had

imagined Mr. Merle's "little girl" still a small child.

'Chita's baggage had been already brought up, and Louise, politely attentive, asks if she should unpack and arrange her things?

But no, Miss Merle wants nothing but quiet, so the kindly disposed servant leaves her.

But she is not long alone, for, scarcely had the door closed, when a quick rap is heard, and before permission is given, it is opened and shut with a loud bang.

'Chita regards her unceremonious visitor in silent astonishment.

She is a rather pretty little blonde of twenty years, with neat, slender figure and vivacious manners.

After one good look, she seizes 'Chita in her arms and, giving her a vigorous hug and kiss, exclaims:

"There! I knew, just the minute I looked at you that I should fall *quite* in love! But of course you have no idea who I am. Allow me, Miss Merle," with an extravagant drawing-room curtesy" to present to your kindly consideration Miss Viva Paulding, daughter of the exceedingly sweet tempered lady you met down stairs. But the idea" she continued, throwing herself upon the bed, and giving her companion no time for reply, "of our thinking you a baby, and fixing up *such* a room—I declare it is *too* ridiculous ——"

"Chatter! Chatter!" interrupts Poll. "Bad girl talk too much."

"Oh, you dear, delightful old thing! *You* were the cause of my mother's black looks—how I *do* wish you could speak English! Conchita, child, why don't you say something? you have not opened your mouth since I've been in the room."

"Because, my dear young lady, you have given me no opportunity."

"There!" pouted the chatter-box, "one would think you my Uncle's own child. The very first remark you make is a reproach to my constant chatter and that, you must know, is his lordship's pet theme."

"You misunderstand," says 'Chita, smilingly, "I rather like your talk—it is novel."

"Oh, how perfectly delightful! You are a rare treasure, my love! You cannot imagine the exquisite joy it is to talk to an appreciative listener—but my dear child, how is it you speak such plain English? Scarcely a perceptible accent."

"My Father taught me." "My Uncle speaks Spanish nicely, doesn't he? I've heard so, but am no judge of such small matters—by the by—what do you think of the old fellow—handsome, isn't he? I'm real proud of him."

"He is also kind and gentle."

"Gentle? poor child! you know nothing about him. Wait till you've had a few royal rows—oh yes! he is kind enough when you don't rouse him. You must be a pink of propriety, my dear, never say or do naughty things, humbly beg pardon for things you *never* do, regulate both your thoughts and actions to *his* will, or you will encounter storms! But I won't tell any more tales, for I really love Uncle Earnest—in spite of our many skirmishes, and he is just as *good* as he is *bad*—so there now! Well," rising to withdraw, "I must tear myself away—for a short time only—and strongly recommend a good sound nap."

She disappears, and 'Chita, following her advice, is soon in dreamland.

CHAPTER V.

"AND I would ask, merely as a matter of curiosity—of course, I have no *personal* feelings—if you expect that aggravating parrot to remain here?"

A week has passed since our heroine's arrival, and Mrs. Paulding, in her coldest, most biting tones is engaged in what Viva terms "the delightful occupation of nagging Uncle Earnest."

But she doesn't make much of it this morning, for when tormented, he can be as hard as rock. His manner is icily polished, as he replies:

"I shall gratify your curiosity on *this* occasion, though, as a rule, I never encourage it. Yes, I expect the parrot to remain where she is. Any other information my dear?"

They always said "my dear" when angry.

She was furious and sincerely wished that he was thirty years younger, so that she might indulge—not her curiosity, but her anger—by a direct application of the slipper.

But, remembering her entire dependence on him, she refrained from saying anything more bitter than:

"My wishes, then, are not to be considered, when opposed to those of a silly girl! Really, one would think there is still truth in the old saw, 'No fool

like an old fool!' The one woman whose every whim you gratified in days gone by——"

"Alice!" he thundered, "never mention that name, or by the living God you will repent it! I am master here, and, if you wish to be driven out by a poor, unoffending girl and a senseless bird, go! We will endeavor to bear your absence."

She rose, and assuming her most majestic manner, passed through the door which he politely held open.

Earnest Greyson, ten years before our story began, had become so completely infatuated with a beautiful French actress, that he married, and, as his sister said, "pandered to her every whim."

The fascination lasted, till, one miserable day, about six months after marriage, he found, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that she had been untrue to him.

They had a few words—he in a terrible rage, she exasperatingly cool. That very night, she ran away with a former lover, and her husband saw her no more.

He had no difficulty in procuring a divorce, but nothing could fill the great, bitter void of his heart. But hard work is a great comforter; so, devoting himself to his favorite study—Law, he soon became known as a talented solicitor, much sought after in difficult cases.

His sister, Mrs. Paulding, becoming a widow just then, gladly accepted his offer of a home, for she was by no means well off. Unfortunately, all parties had strong wills and hot tempers, which often caused much unpleasantness.

Viva and Uncle Earnest indulged in many "little

skirmishes," but their mutual affection prevented anything more serious.

Of the beautiful wretch, once his wife, Earnest often heard through the press; for she had returned to the stage under her old name—whether real, or assumed, he never knew.

And now, though quite wealthy, he was known as one of the hardest workers in the city; a cold, polished man, caring nothing for society, a veritable woman hater; just, but exacting.

Highly honorable; a fine matrimonial catch, but not catchable. In fact, a non-committal man.

As Conchita was in deep mourning, and could not, with propriety, enter society, Mrs. Paulding decided to give up their usual sea-side visit, and spend the remainder of the hot weather in some quiet mountain retreat.

Mr. Greyson would join them later, should the hunting and fishing prove good.

So they packed, and after a few hours run, found themselves comfortably settled in a large, airy farm-house, whose fat, good-natured mistress thought nothing too good for the young ladies, but to whom "Madam" was a great terror.

Mr. Greyson, being duly informed of the game supply, wrote that he would join them shortly.

Mrs. Paulding spends most of her time in reading novels, preserving her complexion, polishing her nails, taking naps and scolding the girls.

"Conchita," says Viva one afternoon, "I am tired to death of this dull life! Let us do something outrageous! Anything for variety, you know."

"What do you propose?" asked her quieter companion.

"Why—can you ride on horseback?"

"Yes."

"Well, my pet, I have a lovely plan which we can carry out *beautifully* if you only have the proper spirit. You know that horse of Mrs. Simms'—the long backed one we saw plowing—now, I propose, Miss Propriety, that we take a ride on the graceful animal. What thinkest thou?"

"Surely you don't mean for both of us to ride him at the same time?"

"'Surely' I do," she mimics.

"But Mrs. Simms—will she not object?"

"Ask her nothing about it. There's no harm—and I'll think it real down mean if you refuse. Say quick—yes or no?"

"Well, if you think there is no harm—I know so little of American ways—we may as well have the frolic. But, Viva, what would your mother say?"

"Oh, let her say—who cares? What's the use of being young if you never have any fun? Come along, let's hunt a bridle and saddle, though I am sure I have no idea how to put them on the creature."

Away they go, find the proper equipments, then catch the horse, a long bodied animal, quite capable of carrying double. But how to saddle him? Both had often seen it done, but had no definite idea on the subject. At last he is "rigged" to their satisfaction, and 'Chita, mounted in the saddle, Viva holding on behind, they start on their pleasure trip, laughing gaily at every step.

"Can't you make him go a little faster?" asks Viva, as they canter down the most sequestered road in the neighborhood. "What's the use of *poking* through life?"

"I think not," returns 'Chita. "We are nearly at

full speed now, and I am afraid you would fall, should he begin running.

"Oh, I can stay on. He is fat and lazy, and needs the switch." Taking the switch from 'Chita, she gives one sharp cut across his back. Here is her own description of what followed:

"The switch had barely *touched* him when the miserable wretch gave such a spring that I tumbled off. Recovering from the shock, I looked about for my late companions, and saw them flying along at full speed. 'Chita, her long black hair floating far behind, her little hands clutching wildly at the reins, remained firmly seated, though I know she was scared most to death. Of course I followed as fast as possible, making hundreds of resolutions never, *never* to do it again, when to my infinite relief, I saw a man spring from the wood, catch the bridle and hold the horse quite still! He lifted 'Chita down, and she stood leaning against a tree. I was awfully glad to find she was not hurt—only a little weak from her unusual exertion. But imagine my amaze, on turning to thank our preserver, to find him no other than my old crony, Harry McAlister."

"Oh Harry!" she exclaimed, "you are a perfect *jewel!* What on *earth* should we have done without you? And how *did* you happen to be so near?"

"This, you must know, my dear young lady, is favorite hunting ground. But who is your friend?" he asks, lowering his voice. "She's a perfect beauty!"

"Oh that's Uncle Earnest Greyson's ward—just from Mexico—come, let me introduce you."

The girls explain their adventure, and they chat merrily for some time. Finally, Viva remarks:

"Well, I should like to know how we are to get back. I have not the remotest idea which way to start; have you, 'Chita?"

"No;" answered that young lady, "but if you are not afraid to remount, the horse will take us back."

Viva was willing, especially when Mr. McAlister assured them that there was no danger; that their steed had cooled down, and would not run of his own accord.

"Now, Harry," says Viva, "if ever you let Uncle Earnest hear of this scrape, I'll clip your accquaintance."

"'Is thy servant a dog?'" quotes he. "Rest assured, 'twill never reach him; for how could I endure life without your sweet smile? But, do be merciful and let me call."

"Oh we'll be charmed, if you behave nicely, and don't tell tales. We are at Mrs. Simms'—you know where she lives?"

"No, but can soon find out. Good-bye!" he calls, as they gently canter down the road.

"Well," he mused, "if Miss Viva does not get herself into serious trouble, I'll be surprised. What imp of thoughtlessness could have prompted her to ride a strange horse—double, at that? The other one, though—she's true mettle. How superbly she held her own! But Viva—she'll need a strong, firm hand to control her restless nature." And wondering, vaguely, if his hands were strong and firm enough for the undertaking, he picks up his gun and hunting-bag; and walks slowly off, to his boarding-house.

CHAPTER VI.

"CHITA," says Viva, as they come near the house, "suppose someone sees us. What shall we do?"

"Why, put the horse where we got him, and confess to Mrs. Simms. 'Twould be better, any way."

"You may be right; I feel repentant enough to show my penitence in any way."

Fortunately, they escape notice, and putting the horse and his gear where they found them, make their way to the house, looking as demure as nuns.

In the cool, shady parlor, they find Mr. Greyson, who had arrived before he was expected.

"Ah, young ladies!" he exclaims, laying aside his book, "come here and give an account of yourselves. I have been here," glancing at his watch, "two hours and a half, yet, till now, have been unable to see or hear of you. Where have you been, my dears?"

"Well, my dear," says Viva, mimicing his tone, "do you want the truth, or a fib?"

"The truth, always, you saucy piece," he returns with a laugh.

"Very well, then—ask no uncomfortable questions, for we shall neither tell where we have been, nor anything about this afternoon's occupation. Shall we 'Chita?"

"I should feel better satisfied if we told your Uncle," returns her companion.

"Well I should not. So my dear Uncle, you must really excuse us. Come Conchita, we must dress before her ladyship discovers us."

Later on, in their own room she remarks severely:

"What is the use of confessing everything? I suppose, that, being a Catholic, you have to tell all your misdoings to the priest—but there is no earthly use in making Uncle Earnest your Father Confessor."

"But Viva, is it right to deceive him, even in a trifle?"

"Why, child, we don't deceive him—we simply don't tell him. Don't you see, Miss Innocence?"

Mr. McAlister called a few evenings later.

"Why Harry," exclaimed Mr. Greyson, "how did you know we were here?"

"Oh," he answered carelessly, "I met the young ladies in their rambles, and begged permission to call—'twas granted only on peculiar conditions—" But receiving a warning glance from Viva's blue eyes, he abruptly changed the subject.

Harry and Viva had long been devoted friends and firm allies in many a piece of mischief. They had been intimate for years, and teased, tormented, and admired each other immensely.

Though not wealthy, his bread was comfortably buttered; for his bachelor apartments were luxurious, his saddle horse one of the finest, his tandem incomparable, his garments perfection. He had some talent, and would, probably, have succeeded in literature had fortune been less kind. True, when overcome by periodical spells of industry, he wrote breezy, spicy articles which were usually

accepted. But, being naturally indolent, and needing the spur of necessity, he failed in application.

Notwithstanding the difference of age and position, Mr. Greyson and he were very fond of each other; and were, therefore, mutually delighted to meet in this sleepy little country town.

Viva was delighted at his acquisition, for unless in some mischief, time hung heavily on her hands; and, since their last escapade, 'Chita declined positively engaging in another.

At last, to her great relief, they return home. Cool weather is at hand, and the fashionable world will soon begin its round of pleasure. All its daughters, therefore, must be up and doing.

"Mr. Greyson," said 'Chita one morning, as they sit in the library, "I should like to take music and drawing lessons, if you do not object."

"Certainly, child, why should I?" regarding her kindly. "I shall engage you proper instructors today. Would you prefer private lessons, or going as 'special' to one of our fashionable schools?"

"Private lessons, please; I should feel so awkward among a lot of fashionable young ladies."

"Just as you like," he says, smiling at her disgusted look. "I recommend also, a course of reading. Historic, scientific or classic. You will, soon, be entirely deprived of Viva's company, for society will demand her every thought. I can, if you like, read with you two hours, both morning and evening."

"Oh, thank you! But—has not society claims on *you?* Should I take so much of your time?"

"Society is *nothing* to me, while *you*—you should take all the time I can give you."

"You are kind," she says, pressing her ripe red lips gratefully to his strong, white hand.

"Kind!" he exclaims, flushing hotly, "yes, to myself."

So it came to pass, that each morning, from eight to ten, and the same hours every evening, Conchita and her guardian might be found, busily engaged in study.

He proved a delightful teacher; and, while *she* thoroughly enjoyed each book they read, *he* was making an unconscious study of her.

"Earnest," remarked Mrs. Paulding, in an annoyed tone, several weeks after 'Chita's lessons began, "I really think it *very inconsiderate* in you to have that girl constantly thumping on the drawing-room piano. Simpson has brought in company several times, to find her thumping away at the five-finger exercises—it is too horribly vexatious!"

"Excuse me, Mrs. Paulding, I accidentally overheard your remark," says 'Chita, entering with her books. "Believe me—I will give up my lessons, rather than inconvenience you."

"You shall do nothing of the sort." Her guardian's tone is quiet, but his face has assumed what Viva calls his "black look." "It is *my* wish that you continue. Professor N—— says you have remarkable talent, which should be cultivated.

Mrs. Paulding, I can arrange this matter satisfactorily to all parties—so, say nothing more about it."

Next morning, on entering the library, Conchita is both surprised and delighted to see a handsome piano.

"Yes," says her guardian, answering her eloquent eyes. "I had it brought for your own use; and, as *we* occupy this room, almost exclusively, expect to hear no complaints. Are you pleased, little woman? Ah, I see you are."

"My dear, dear guardian," she murmurs, sinking on the stool beside him, and covering his hand with kisses," you are too kind and good to me."

"You think me kind, little one?" pressing an unseen kiss upon her dark hair. "Most people would tell you I am a hard, stern man."

"Never, to me! You are much kinder than I deserve—but Mr. Greyson, why does your sister dislike me? I try my utmost to please her, but ——"

"Try not to mind her," he interrupts, "she has had a case of chronic ill-temper for years—but, Conchita, if ever you are annoyed, when little troubles arise, will you not come to me for aid?"

"Gladly," she answers, wondering how anyone could think him unkind.

CHAPTER VII.

A YEAR has passed since the occurrence of the above conversation; and during that time our heroine has made rapid progress both in music and drawing.

Professor N——— never tires of praising "Miss Merle's wonderful voice and exquisite touch."

Her life, during the past year, had been quiet, though not unhappy; for, though she could not escape an occasional jar with Mrs. Paulding, the hours spent with her art work, and above all, those delightful morning and evening studies, more than compensated.

Viva, occasionally, entertained her with lengthy descriptions of balls, receptions, kettle-drums, etc., and often insisted on 'Chita's putting the finishing touches to some elaborate toilette, declaring her arrangement of draperies, flowers and ribbons far better than Louise's.

Mrs. Paulding, sometimes gave a *recherche* little dinner at which Conchita, though excused from larger parties, was expected to appear.

Here she met many refined, intelligent people, all of whom showed a kindly interest in the young Mexican.

Mr. McAlister called often, always asking for Miss Merle, but rarely seeing her.

"Conchita," said he guarrdian one day in March, "Prof. N——— is very anxious to have you sing at Mrs. Leonard's concert. He attacked me fiercely last night."

"Why," she returns in surprise, "I told Mrs. Leonard last week I could not oblige her, and she spoke of getting someone else."

"But failed. When does the affair take place?"

"Next Wednesday—I am sorry to disappoint her, but—she should not have depended on me for so difficult a part. Then, you know, I am still in mourning."

"Rather than have her engage a professional, you had better take the part. Your dress, she tells me, should be pure white."

"Of course I shall if *you* wish it. Prof. N——— thinks I can learn it easily—he has been training the others, you know."

"Very well, I know the good lady will be relieved. Speak to Mrs. Paulding about ordering your costume—ah, that reminds me, here is your allowance," handing her a roll of bills.

The concert they spoke of was a charitable entertainment gotten up by Mrs. Leonard, one of the select few Conchita had met since her residence in the great metropolis.

Now, Mrs. Leonard had set her heart on 'Chita's taking the principal part in the cantata, well knowing her striking tropical beauty and rich young voice would cause a sensation among the upper crust. Finding that her persuasions were useless, she appealed in such piteous terms to Mr. Greyson, that he, as we have just seen, gave his assistance.

The important evening arrives, and Conchita stands before her mirror, clad in a long, trailing

white silk, gracefully draped with tulle. Her beautiful shoulders are bare, and her well rounded arms but partly concealed by the long white gloves. Dainty satin slippers peep from beneath her dress, and in her long, flowing tresses is a cluster of lilies-of-the-valley. A spray of the same is fastened at her left shoulder, and, crossing the front, diagonally, is lost, somewhere in the back draperies.

As she stands thus, surveying herself approvingly, Louise enters with the information that the carriage is waiting, but Mr. Greyson "wants to see you in the library, Miss."

He is pacing the room with rapid strides, an open telegram in his hand.

"I am very sorry, dear child," he says as she enters," but I am compelled to leave for R——on the twelve thirty. You cannot imagine how I regret missing your performance. But"—glancing at the message "the call is imperative."

"I too am sorry," she returns" for I sing simply to please you. But" anxiously, "do you like my appearance?"

"Yes," observing her critically, "That dark curtain makes an excellent background—I would like your picture, just as you stand—the pose is perfect.

Well, I must not detain you," taking both her hands he presses his lips to her snowy brow, whispering softly, "good-bye, my little shell,"* then almost roughly,pushes her from him.

She, totally unaccustomed to such caresses, was so disconcerted that she entirely forgot the carriage, and was surprised when Louise warned her that "Mrs. Paulding is awfully impatient, Miss about waiting so long."

* Conchita—little shell.

"*So* relieved, my love," says Mrs. Leonard, as Chita enters the dressing-room. "The others arrived some time ago—and the house is simply crowded; I am sure the evening will be a perfect success. Ah! your costume is *exquisite!*"

The large parlors, which had assumed much the appearance of a theatre, are crowded with well dressed people, all charmed "to help the poor" by attending a concert under the auspices of the fashionable Mrs. Leonard.

The affair passes off with *eclat.* Conchita receives many compliments on her voice and beauty. As soon as the curtain fell on the first scene, the miniature green room was so besieged by impressionable young men, all begging "an introduction to the new beauty," that Mrs. Leonard, tormented almost out of her senses, promised that if they let her alone, and kept others away, she would "try to persuade Miss Merle to receive you, though you must know she is still at her studies, and will not come out for some time."

Consequently, Conchita, who is quite burdened with bouquets, is led forth willingly or not, and presented to numerous admirers.

Mrs. Paulding regards all this adulation with a disapproving eye, and suggests, as soon as possible that "as 'Chita is certainly tired, we will return home. And the infatuated dandies conceive a great dislike to the portly lady as she sweeps down the room, with the two attractive girls following closely in her wake.

"Well, Conchita," remarks Mr. Greyson, a few days after his return, "I hear you created a great sensation at Mrs. Leonard's. I've been terribly bored by a lot of young fellows who seem to have

gone crazy over your voice, your manner, your eyes, and your costume."

"Yes," chimed in Viva, "one young spoon compared her eyes to 'midnight stars!' Though why 'midnight' I cannot imagine. Another vowed she was the personification of '*her bright smile haunts me still!*' while still another, saw in her Byron's '*Maid of Athens.*' And, really, now, if I should repeat *one-half* they said, her poor little head would be completely turned."

"Oh, please don't!" begged 'Chita, blushing hotly. "It really makes me ashamed."

"Ashamed, you silly girl! why, you should be delighted. Only think how charmed I should be to have such lovely things said of me."

"I must say, Viva, it is *illjudged,* to say the least of it, to repeat all this nonsense." Mrs. Paulding's tone is anything but pleasant, as she continues, "You certainly, have been long enough in society to understand that far more than half the compliments paid are only skin deep."

"*Really,*" replied her daughter, almost too innocently, "then, I suppose 'twas only *lip-service* when old Dr. Brownlow complimented you so highly on your youthful appearance."

Her mother flushed angrily, but was too completely cornered to reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCHITA'S second summer is passed very differently from the one spent in the hospitable mansion of good Mrs. Simms.

By the first of July our three ladies are enjoying all the gaieties of Newport.

Mr. Greyson, who heartily despises gay watering places, spoke of going to some quiet mountain retreat, and his ward begged to accompany him; but Mrs. Paulding sternly assured her such a plan was too "highly improper to be *thought* of, even for a *moment*."

"Conchita," remarks Viva, the evening they arrive at this gay sea-side resort, "I hear there is a Spanish Don and English Duke in our hotel. Now suppose we try our powers of fascination—I speak for the Englishman, as my knowledge of Spanish is much too limited to conduct a successful campaign. I *might* misconstrue some tender remark, you know, and cause untold mischief—so, I shall don my blue silk, array myself in pearls and prepare to conquer 'John Bull.'"

"And in what shall I clothe myself to captivate the noble Spaniard?" laughs 'Chita.

"All your things are lovely, but I really think that lemon colored gauze would enchant him. Be sure you take the fan to match, for you handle it with the true grace of your nation—and as good luck would have it, here is a Cloth of Gold for your

dusky tresses," examining the flowers just sent in. "Which of my adorers could have sent it?"

"Come girls," says Mrs. Paulding," we have time for a short walk before dinner."

"Well, I declare!" exclaims Viva as they stroll leisurely along the beach, "if there isn't Harry McAlister, talking to our intended admirers—at least, they *must* be our Don and Duke, for just see what distinguished looking men they are! My! but isn't the Don handsome? Oh that I could speak his soft, liquid language! Your chance would be nowhere!"

They certainly were fine-looking men, with that unmistakable air of breeding which always stamps the real gentleman.

Harry soon recognizes his friends, and, with a bow to the gentlemen, joins the ladies in their promenade.

"And are they really the foreigners I've heard so much about?" asks Viva.

"Yes," he answers, "and they stared hard, as soon as they set eyes on you."

"Oh, how delightful! You *must* know, Chita and I expect to make victims of them—if they stay long enough. Now, I think 'Viva, duchess of ——' what's his name?"

"Duke of C——"

"'Viva, duchess of C——,' would look simply charming in the papers—don't you?"

"No, 'twould be horrible to my eyes. I think—but of course you don't care what I think."

"No, of course not," very sweetly.

"And *I* think," remarks 'Chita with an amused smile," it is worse than foolish for you two to quarrel over a thing, a name, rather, that in all proba-

bility, will never exist. Silly children! you should be *ashamed* of yourselves. I am sure, if only smaller you would pull hair, and claw each other, 'tooth and nail.'"

"Now honestly, 'Chita," asks Viva, "wouldn't you be heart-broken if deprived of the opportunity of becoming Donna—?"

"No, indeed! I should much prefer being plain *Mrs.* Blank."

"That remark, Miss Merle," says Harry, "shows the good sense of a well-balanced mind. Our American girls are often so crazy as literally to sell themselves for a title."

"And among that class of harmless lunatics, you probably class this young person, whose poor brain has never yet been able to attain a stable equilibrium?" asks Viva, scornfully.

"Viva!" exclaims her mother, greatly shocked, "Mr. McAlister's remarks were general; you have no right to make them personal. But we must hurry back and dress for dinner."

"May I have the first waltz?" whispers Harry, as he assists Viva up the steps of their hotel.

But she turns a deaf ear, and marches off in dignified silence.

Conchita lingers a few minutes to comfort him, for she knows, in spite of their many squabbles they are really fond of each other.

The brilliant lights, fine music, beautifully waxed floors, bright eyes and exquisite costumes, all rendered the ball-room very attractive to pleasure seekers.

Our party had no sooner entered the room, than "our mutual friend," the floor manager, begged permission to introduce "*Don Henrique Gonzalez* and the Duke of C——"

Mrs. Paulding graciously consented, and the distinguished looking foreigners soon joined the group of admirers already gathered about her girls.

The good lady had a rather hard time of it, racking her poor brain for polite French sentences to repeat to the Spaniard. As neither could speak the other's language, and she had sadly neglected her French, conversation was limited.

So, it was a positive relief, when the Don, turning to Conchita, asked glibly in Spanish, to favor him for the next waltz.

"Ah, *Senorita!*" he exclaims, after the first round of the slow, dreamy waltz, "This is truly like heaven. I feel that my feet are wings, and I am floating through paradise, with an angel!"

"Really, *Senor,*" she returns, blushing hotly at his highflown compliment, "you must not express yourself so extravagantly—it is not customary in America."

"But, *Senorita,* I speak from the heart! And, better still—the angel is Spanish and speaks my own language."

Though annoyed by his many flatteries, she gives a sigh of regret as the last strain dies away, for his dancing is the very *poetry of motion.*

"Ah, the *Senorita* sighs! she is tired?" offering his arm.

"No, not tired, only regretting that delightful waltz was ended. You dance beautifully Senior."

"Then, most adorable *Senorita* may I beg the honor of another?"

She looks over her tablets, and allows him the joy of writing his long name opposite a waltz near the end of the programme.

Harry McAlister revenges himself on Viva by paying marked attention to Claudia Saunders, Viva's "pet horror."

Viva and her Duke find themselves opposite this devoted couple on more than one occasion, and she has an uncomfortable idea that they are not accidentally placed.

Seeing him so absorbed in his partner, she flirts outrageously with the Englishman, gives him a rose from her hair, and, when certain Harry is looking, pins it in his buttonhole, with many little airs and graces.

Poor Harry is terribly provoked but vows he will make no sign.

"She's as miserable as you are," whispers 'Chita, as their hands meet in the "grand chain," but he doubted.

"Haven't we had a charming evening?" says Viva, as they retire to their rooms. "The Duke was *delightful* and *so* attentive—but I'm tired to death. Good-night."

"There's a gentleman in your parlor, Miss," said a servant, as, late next afternoon, Viva and 'Chita returned from the beach.

"Why, it must be Uncle Earnest!" exclaimed Viva, "though it is hardly time for him yet. Did he say he was expected?"

"Yes, Miss, he said you were looking for him."

"Oh well, I know it is he;" and away she ran to their private parlor.

The contrast between the bright sunlight, and the heavily curtained room was so great, that she could hardly see the occupant, but feeling so sure it was her Uncle, she threw herself into his arms, exclaiming, with a good hearty kiss, "I'm so *awfully,*

awfully glad to see you again, you dear old darling!"

"And I am 'so *awfully, awfully*' obliged for your gracious reception, *you dear little darling!*" answers the visitor, holding her close, and taking another kiss.

"*Harry McAlister!*' withdrawing herself from his arms, and trying to wither him with scorn. "You ought to be *ashamed* of yourself!"

"I'm not, though," he answers in a satisfied tone.

"What do you mean, sir, by deceiving me so basely? Wretched creature, I believe I hate you! Why did you pretend to be Uncle Earnest?"

"My dear girl, why will you storm at me? I assure you, I had no idea of deceiving you; I simply came around to smooth over our last quarrel, and told the servant you were expecting me, for you have been all day—have you not?"

"I certainly expected you to call and apologize for your rudeness. I," in a dignified tone, "never quarrel."

"All right," he laughs, good-naturedly, "*I* was a horrid bear, and humbly beg pardon, and *you* were the same sweet little witch you always are. Is that slice of 'humble pie' sufficiently large to appease your just indignation? I am desperate—will say *anything* you command."

"Well," relenting slowly, "if I excuse you *this* time, you must promise never *never* again to allude to my selling myself. For, you must know, I am above price."

"'And more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold.' But, are you really expecting your Uncle?"

"Of *course*. You don't think I invented it on the

spur of the moment, do you—just to excuse my own awkward position. Say, do you?" anxiously.

"Well, I don't know," teasingly, "I am aware that you possess great inventive genius; and, too, the 'position' was to me so pleasant, that I could think of nothing else."

"Now, sir, you can just hush! If you don't behave properly, I shall leave you to your own reflections."

They chat pleasantly for a half hour or more, when, suddenly, Mr. Greyson enters.

"Oh Uncle!" cries Viva, embracing him warmly. "Have you just come, or have you seen Mama and 'Chita?"

"Just arrived," he answers. "Have seen no one but yourself. Glad to see you Harry;" shaking hands, "thought you were booked for the mountains."

"Excuse me," says Viva, "I must dress for dinner."

"You dine at six?" asked her uncle. "Then run along, you have just ten minutes grace."

Harry says good-bye, and Mr. Greyson, making a hasty toilet, returns to the parlor just as his sister, resplendent in lavender silk and diamonds accompanied by Conchita, daintily robed in white, enters the room.

The elder lady offers her cheek to be kissed, but carefully holds back her draperies, warning him not to crush her lace.

"You can't think how glad I am to see you," says 'Chita, offering her hand.

"And is that your way of showing it? As you seem to have forgotten your Mexican salutation, I must refresh your memory," and, taking her face

between his hands, he kisses first one. then the other rosy cheek.

"Brother!" cries Mrs. Paulding, "I am *astounded!* such conduct is remarkably *undignified,* to say the least, for one of your age and position. And, Conchita, I am *shocked* that you allow *any* man such liberties. Young ladies should never permit such *freedom!*"

"What should young ladies never permit?" asks Viva, who enters just in time to prevent an altercation, "I suppose you have been picking flaws, as usual, Mama—for Uncle Earnest looks like black thunder, and poor 'Chita wears a mournful expression as only you can produce."

"I never like to see propriety *outraged*—but of course, *I* am always the party at fault," assuming an aggrieved expression.

"Yes," answers her daughter, sweetly, "You generally are. But do come to dinner, the gong sounded ages ago, and I've always heard that a good meal was a wonderful help to one's good temper."

"No impertinence, Miss," says her enraged parent, marching stiffly from the room.

"And now," says Mr. Greyson, as, later in the evening, Conchita and he promenade the long piazza, "I at last have an opportunity to tell you the object of my visit. I must be in New Orleans on the twenty-fifth, and you, if you like, may accompany me, spend a few weeks with your Aunt in Mexico, and return with me in September. Do you like the plan?"

"Yes, very much!" she exclaims.

"I see you do," he returns with a smile.

"Auntie is so anxious to have me visit her; she urges it in all her letters."

"And Alfonso? Does he not urge it?" closely scanning her face.

"Yes;" she answers without embarrassment, "but he speaks of coming to see me, while Auntie I know, will never leave Mexico."

"You are very fond of your cousin, are you not?"

"Oh, yes. We have been devoted ever since we played at housekeeping, long ago in 'childhood's happy hour."

"Ah! that is just the point; now, that you are no longer children, do you expect to 'play at housekeeping in reality?"

"Oh, no," blushing hotly, "I never think of 'Fonso in that way."

"But he does of you. Only last week I received a long letter in which he begs my influence in securing your consent to an early marriage.

Now, that your mourning is over, he thinks you should pay more attention to his wishes. So, now, my pet, "softly pressing the slender fingers upon his arm, "will you remain in Mexico with your young lover, or return home with your old guardian?"

"Return with you, of course. But, have you heard any Mexican news—political news, I mean?"

"Yes, it is reported that France will withdraw her troops some time during the summer. Your cousin, however, thinks it untrue. 'Twould be certain death to the *empire*, if not to the *Emperor*."

"But why should France desert Maximilian?"

"Napoleon, I think, is a little afraid of the United States. Our country, you know, has always been suspicious of French influence—or, I might say

power, in Mexico; though, two years ago, when Maximilian became Emperor, we were too busily engaged in our own unpleasantness to interfere.

I have heard, through a friend in power at Washington, that a lengthy diplomatic correspondence has been carried on with France regarding the matter, which has just terminated in Napoleon's promise to withdraw the troops.

Deprived of French aid, Maximilian will scarcely be so mad as to remain——"

"Ah, Sinorita," interrupts the Don," what happi- to find you once more! I was *miserable!* in *despair!* of the three waltzes you promised, I have lost two—but I searched *everywhere* and could find you not! Come, hear you not the music? We will float to its heavenly strains!"

"First, let me present my guardian—Mr. Greyson, Don Henrique Gonzalez."

With a low bow to Mr. Greyson, the Don hurried her away to fulfil her engagement.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Paulding made numerous objections to 'Chita's Mexican visit—stormed, scolded, persuaded but all in vain.

"You are becoming more and more like Earnest;" she said, "stubbornness is no name for your conduct. A *mule* is docile compared with you!"

"Mrs. Paulding," returns 'Chita indignantly, "why do you treat me so? I am never unmindful of your feelings."

"Don't speak to me of feelings, you artful girl! Of course it is not hurtful to my feelings to stand by and see my poor brother inveigled into *everything*, no matter how unreasonable or even *reckless* that enters your silly brain. Oh, no! you have never

annoyed me—but I wash my hands of it, you may go where and with whom you please—I shall not attempt to prevent it. But, you will remember my warning when you find yourself *hopelessly* mixed in political intrigues."

"My stay in Mexico will scarcely permit of that. —I go merely to visit relatives."

"Ah yes! and one of them is, I believe, devoted to the Emperor."

"Yes, my cousin is much attached to His Majesty."

"And it's my opinion that your Emperor, cousin and entire Catholic party will come to grief. Self-will, I am thankful to say, is always punished; Earnest will probably die of yellow fever, and you, perhaps, meet your death in some Mexican riot. But, have your own way, by all means, I haven't a word to say," with which comforting remark she sweeps angrily from the room.

"Conchita! Conchita!" calls Viva, "have you finished your battle? Yes, I see she got the best of it. Come. Uncle and Harry are waiting—hurry or she'll swoop down on us. Now, do, child, try to look a little more cheerful—your look says plainly, 'the burden laid upon me, is greater than I can bear.'"

CHAPTER XI.

TWO weeks later, we find Conchita and her guardian cosily established at the St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans. She will remain only a few days in the Crescent City, then continue her journey alone, remaining with Donna Castro till called for.

'Twas now about noon. Mr. Greyson bade her good-bye immediately after breakfast, but promised to devote himself to her pleasure after dinner.

As she sits at her window, idly watching the ever changing crowd below, she is disturbed by a rap. On permission, a servant enters, saying:

"Dar's a lady, mum, what wants to see you, an' axed to be brung ter your comprivate repartment."

"A lady to see me?" said 'Chita, "surely you are mistaken—I have no acquaintances here.'

"You see mum, she ax fur Massa Greyson, an' I tell her he done lef' de house. Den she say, 'de young lady, I see her!'"

"Very well, you may show her up. I wonder," she says to herself, "who it can be?"

She has not long to wait, for in a few minutes the door is thrown open, and in walks a handsome showily dressed woman of thirty years. She is possessed of a small, well-proportioned figure, brilliant brunette complexion, full red lips and fine black eyes, through which she regards 'Chita insolently a

few minutes, then coolly seats herself in the most comfortable chair, exclaiming airily:

"So, you are his latest darling? *Mon Dieu!* but my lord has excellent taste. And how long, my pretty one, have you been in favor?"

"Pray explain yourself, madam," says 'Chita, still standing, her face filled with indignant surprise, "I am utterly at a loss to account for this visit."

"*Chut!* don't pretend ignorance!"

"And would prefer" she continues calmly, "your calling when my guardian is at home."

"Your *guardian?* ha! ha! No doubt, he would be delighted to see me," she speaks with a strong accent, and is decidedly French. "Come now, did you never hear him of me speak? Is it so?"

"I can not tell, as you have not given your name."

"My name? Ah, yes, quite thoughtless, to be sure. Is it possible, my sweet innocent, that you have never heard your guardian(?) speak of his dearly loved wife—better known, perhaps, as Blanchette ——?"

"No madame, he has never mentioned the name, though I have often seen it in press," replies our heroine coldly.

"I see," rousing herself from the lazy attitude she at first assumed, "you insolent creature! you think me not his wife? Ask him, my lovely one, when next you meet, and watch how the dear fellow swallows the little pill. Ha! ha! what pleasure would Blanchette take in seeing it *choke* him!"

"Madame, I know nothing of your affairs, and wish to remain in ignorance of them, in short, feel no *interest* on the subject. Shall I ring for a servant to attend you out?"

"*Chut!* you feel no interest? you show me the door? You pretend to care not for him that was my husband? *Mon Dieu!* you cannot deceive me! *Revenge* it was that brought me here! Did I not the tenter glances see, that last night between you passed? Little thought he Blanchette's eyes were on him. And *you,* sweet innocent, would pretend you love him not? *Chut!* Blanchette is no fool! But I know by the light of his eyes, you he *adores!* What care I if he suffer? did he not me scorn?"

"Really, Madame, this is quite unnecessary. If sufficiently interested, I could easily procure information from my guardian."

"Ah! ha! ha! you would act the piece of white marble? will you, my sweet? I tell you I *am* his wife! Him you shall *never* marry! *Never! Never!*"

"Madame, you *force* me to ring," says 'Chita, pulling desperately at the bell rope.

"See this lady to the street door," she says to the servant who answers her ring.

"This, he will know," says the woman, tossing a photo on the table.

"Adieu, sweet one, we'll meet again some day."

Poor Conchita is much disturbed by this visit. Up and down her room she walks, vainly trying to compose her thoughts.

"Why," she asks, "should I become so agitated by this news? Why should I care that my guardian is married—and to *such* a woman? And that horrible suspicion, could it be true—that he loved *me?* Or rather, can it be true that he ever loved *her?* Shall I tell him of the visit, or try to forget Blanchette's existence? Yes, I had better tell him for of course *he* can explain everything."

With this comforting thought she begins once more her old occupation; but, try as she would, she could not rid herself of the fancy that the woman's story was true. But why did she care? That thought worried her more than anyother.

"Well, Conchita," said her guardian, as he leans back in his luxurious, easy chair, "how have you spent the day? Getting into mischief?"

"I've not enjoyed it very much, but don't let us talk of troubles till you have rested."

"We shall do nothing of the kind," he answers decidedly. "Draw your chair nearer, so that I can see your face; there, that is better. Now, tell me what has worried you?"

"Well," reluctantly, "if you *will* have it, a woman came here this morning asking for you; and, finding you absent, insisted on seeing me. She called herself Blanchette, and claimed to be your wife. After trying every means to get rid of her, I had finally to order a servant to show her out. Now, can you explain? Do you know her—but here is her photograph. She insisted that you would recognize it."

Mr. Greyson could scarcely control his passion, he was perfectly white with rage.

"Yes," he replied, glancing at the picture, "I know her only too well. Would to God I had never seen her face. Conchita, that woman has been my *curse*. Ten years ago, I was fool enough to marry her; but found, after a few weeks' happiness, how utterly unworthy she was of any good man's love. I came home one day, to find that she had forfeited the very name of *wife;* and, since that hour, have never seen her."

"My poor, *dear* guardian, you have suffered! How I *hate* myself for telling you of that horrible visit," exclaimed 'Chita, her eyes and voice full of sympathy.

"That, undoubtedly, was her object in asking for you—she felt sure you would tell me everything. But, how did she know we were here?"

"She saw us last night at the theatre; and, I suppose, had us followed."

"You cannot know how I regret your being so annoyed by my private affairs. But, perhaps, 'tis better you should know how unfortunate a man your guardian is—'twill make you forget, when he is cross and cranky. Will it not dear child?"

"You are never cross to me," she says gently, "and I shall love you all the more, since I know of the heavy burden you bear so nobly. Excuse me, please, I have a bad headache, so will retire. Good-night."

She withdraws, leaving him to his own unhappy thoughts.

CHAPTER XII.

A WEEK later Conchita arrived safely at her Aunt's summer home. It is a large, roomy, white adobe building, charmingly situated in the Valley of *Tenochtitlan,* not far from the City of Mexico.

The good Senora, though completely surprised, was quite overcome by joy; for Conchita had not written of her intended visit.

"Why Auntie," she exclaims, after being almost smothered in kisses, "where is Alfonso? Still in the city?"

"Yes, my child, I have had but little of his company lately. Poor boy! How he will grieve at not being first to greet you."

"That would certainly be very foolish!" she laughs. "What keeps him so long? Not the gay court, I hope."

"Certainly not," returns his mother proudly. "Military duty, alone, detains him; his General never grants him a long absence. Besides, Alfonso is so devoted to His Majesty that he keeps a constant watch for anything even approaching treason."

"I know," returns 'Chita, "that treachery is feared; for the Emperor has many enemies. You

have heard that France will withdraw her troops?"

"Yes, but could scarcely believe it," sighs the Senora.

"My guardian thinks it madness for Maximilian to remain if deserted by France."

"But our holy Mother, the Church, supports him; she has not only given her brave sons, *Miramon* and *Mejia*, but offered large loans of money. But the poor Empress—how my heart aches for her! she is almost distracted with anxiety for her husband."

"Is she still with His Majesty?"

"Oh, no! she is in Europe, imploring aid for her husband. Think of that beautiful young creature a *born princess*, being driven to such extremity!"

The Senora, like most of her nation, is much given to gestures; her manner is so highly dramatic, that one entirely ignorant of Spanish, could easily understand the drift of her remarks.

In the midst of a long description of Maximilian's mild, enlightened policy, Carlotta's beauty and goodness, the trying political condition of their fair country, they are disturbed by loud cries of "Hurrah for the Emperor! Down with Juarez! Away with him!"

'Chita soon found these sounds of approval and disapproval came only from a highly patriotic parrot, perched on the flower stand.

"Why, Auntie," she asks, much amused, "have you even talked politics to this poor creature?"

"Oh, no!" she answered, that's 'Fonso's pet, named for you, and he delights in making her patriotic. What became of your Poll? Surely you had not the heart to leave her."

"No. The poor girl died only a few months after we left you. I suppose the confinement was too

great—then the poor thing missed our bright, sunny climate and open air life more, even, than myself."

The end of the week brought Alfonso, on a brief visit.

His mother had dispatched a messenger with news of Conchita's arrival, but he was unable, till now, to obtain leave.

Our heroine certainly looked lovely as she sat in the open court, busily engaged in drawing the threads for her Spanish lace-work. Her full white dress, and dainty laces, become her greatly. So thinks her cousin, as he unseen, watches her nimble fingers.

"So you have answered our prayers at last!" he exclaims, taking both hands, and kissing each glowing cheek.

"At last," she answers. "But stand up again, 'Fonso," as he sits beside her, "I haven't admired you or your uniform sufficiently."

"I hope," he says, as he strokes his moustache, "you feel proud of your handsome cousin?"

"Yes, I believe I do—or, rather, I will, if he is really as nice as he looks!" she returns merrily.

The Senora was, of course, glad to see her son, and delighted that the cousins enjoyed themselves together.

"Surely," she says, with a wise shake of her head, "they will love and marry. What a handsome couple they would make, walking up the aisle of our grand Cathedral! he in his uniform, she in spotless satin and orange blossoms! Ah, me! how it brings back my own young days, when his dear father sang sweet love songs under my window." And the good lady sighed over the past romance of

her delightful, though to us, peculiar Mexican courtship. The tender glances, watchful jealousy, stolen interviews, when the household enjoyed the universal *siesta;* passionate love letters, let down, and drawn up through her window; emblematic flowers, sent in the same way; and those exquisite love songs which spoke to the very *soul!*

This, of course preceded the regular engagement, which meant set visits in the *Sala,* where the lovers are never left alone, but are constantly attended by a watchful duenna.

Conchita treated Alfonso with frank, cousinly affection, but told him plainly, when he urged a closer relation, that she thought it impossible to return his passion.

"Love me just a little, 'Chita darling!" he pleads. "I am sure you cared for me before you left us. What has changed you?"

"Now Fonso," she begs, "be a good boy, and forget all this. Seriously, I cannot love you in that way."

"Forget? When I've loved you all your life? 'Chita, you *must* love me—did you not promise, long ago, to be my little wife?"

"Ah, I was then only a tiny child! Would you marry me, knowing I *could* not love?"

"A hungry man takes even *crumbs* when denied the loaf!" he answers passionately.

"Cousin," she says, gravely, "you place me in a most unpleasant position. Why persist in this matter? You will only drive me back to the United States."

"Conchita you are cruel," he cries desperately. "You know I adore you! How miserable I am away from you!"

"Come," she says, "let us make a compact. I will treat you with sisterly affection provided you never allude to this subject; otherwise, you can expect only coldness. Should my feelings change, no false modesty shall prevent my telling. Now are you satisfied?"

"I suppose I must be, for your conditions are fair and open," his tone is resigned, but he thinks "While there's life, there's hope."

Alfonso, before leaving, persuades his mother to come for a while to the city. She, thinking the idea would further her matrimonial plans, readily consented.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE City of Mexico presents, to Conchita, a charming spectacle, as she stands, viewing it from the house-top.

They arrived only a half hour ago, and she, insisting she is not at all tired, begs Fonso to take her around the city.

Her aunt, in a shocked tone, reminds her that it is scandalous for young people to be seen abroad unattended by an elderly married woman, so, with a mental reservation on Mexican etiquette, she contents herself with the house-top.

Their hotel is very near the grand square, towards which the principal streets converge, and on which are situated the famous old cathedral, palace of the Cortez, and other important buildings.

Surrounded on all sides by lofty mountains, with her chain of blue lakes in the distance, Mexico occupies the same ground on which, formerly, stood the ancient Aztec city, *Tenochtitlan*.

"How grandly beautiful!" exclaims Conchita, feasting her eyes on the exquisite panorama, "you say this is the *Plaza Mayor*, which is considered one of the finest in America?"

"Yes," answers her cousin, "and right over there is the Cathedral, built on the site of the ancient *Teocalli*. We'll go there to-morrow, if mother can accompany us, and see the famous calendar stone."

"What is that long, straight road over there?"

"Oh, that's the *Calzada*, which leads to Chalco; it's as old as the Spanish conquest. You can see it is built on an embankment, and by the wayside, is the celebrated shrine of our *Lady of Guadaloupe*, cut into a curiously shaped rock. Those scattering houses are the *Villa de Gaudaloupe*, the resting place of many pilgrims."

"I need not ask if that lofty hill, crowned with its magnificent palace, is *Chapultepec*. How grandly it towers above this fertile plain!"

"Ah!" he cries, "look on the *Boulevard Emperiale*, there goes His Majesty's coach!"

She looks and beholds one of the finest coaches in the world. It is crimson and gold—every available place being covered by the royal coat of arms, wrought in gold. Each corner is finished with a golden cherub, and the vehicle is drawn by eight milk-white horses.

"How gorgeous!" she exclaims.

"Yes," he continues, "'twas presented to the Empress by Napoleon. The interior is of heavy white silk, with fringes, cords, and tassels to match. Some days they drive black horses, but I admire the white ones more."

"So do I—but what fine building is that?"

"The palace of *Buena Vista*—Marshal Bazine's residence."

"Do you know," looking into the *plaza* below, "I find the people much more interesting than architecture. Just look at that poor woman, carrying three

babies in her *rebozo*—and what solemn little faces they have! Do they ever laugh or cry, I wonder? That group, over there, dining on the ground, would furnish a rare study for an artist. Observe their careless, easy attitudes, their polite consideration of each other, though we *know* they are as hungry as dogs."

"Oh," he returns, carelessly, "that is the very lowest type. We have nothing in common."

"I don't care," she answers, "it is also the picturesque type. What could be more pathetic than that old crone, in the Archades, selling lottery tickets! Did you hear her say 'buy one, the blessed Virgin will bring you the money?'"

"Yes," he says, "that is just what keeps them so degradingly poor. They have no homes—are born, live and die on the streets."

"You are unjust!" she exclaims scornfully. "How can you expect poor wretches like them, with no education or refinement, to resist temptation, when the highest in the land uphold the accursed lottery? I tell you, 'Fonso, it is a dark blot on our fair country, and she will never prosper till this terrible evil is removed."

"Why, Conchita," he answers in surprise, "lotteries are countenanced by both church and State. They do no harm when we can afford the risk."

"We must agree to differ," she says, unconvinced by his argument. "But just look at that beautiful girl making *tortillas*—I have quite outgrown my taste for them."

"Yes," he laughs, "you are not at all Mexican in your ways—don't even smoke *cigarettes*."

"You remember," with a smile, "how Papa

scolded you for trying to teach me? I see even the babies smoke here."

"See!" he exlaims, "There goes a train of *burrors* loaded with *pulque*. You remember them?"

"Yes, so many used to pass our house. Good patient creatures they are, to carry such heavy loads—but, really, we live centuries behind the times."

"You don't mean," in much amaze, "that you prefer New York to Mexico."

"In many respects, yes. *There* we have so much more liberty. I must confess, that, since my visit to the United States I find many errors in our own social system. There I might go any where, alone, or attended by you without exciting remark, while *here*, it is so different

There a woman can actually make a respectable living, *here*, they can only marry. You give us absolutely no freedom till then."

"Yes," he acknowledges, "it is a little hard on you girls—but that is because we wish to shield you from evil."

Next day, accompanied by his mother, they take a pleasant drive around the city. Going first to the Cathedral, built on the ruins of an ancient temple, dedicated to the god *Mixitli* they find the *Kellenda*, a large, circular stone, beautifully carved with hieroglyphics, by which the Aztecs represented the motion of the earth around the sun, dividing the year about as we do—or rather, making the solar year equal to our own.

They visit the Academy of fine Arts, and among many curious and historic relics, see the feather shield of Montezuma. This had been sent by Cortez to the Emperor Charles the Fifth and by him pre-

sented to the museum at Vienna, where it remained till Maximilian restored it to Mexico. Idols of all shapes and sizes, exquisite pottery and the famous sacrificial stone with its wonderful carving, attracted their attention. Conchita could not believe that the latter had ever been intended for so horrible a purpose—for the sculptured images of the sun, moon, and groups of men are so finely wrought, requiring such patient, delicate skill, that 'twould be simple folly to drench them with the blood of victims.

"That rude hole," she says, "marring it's top, was certainly cut by our Spanish ancestors in carrying out some of their own unhallowed schemes. Come, let us look for the picture writings."

The manuscripts were mostly of *maguey* plant, the colors bright and indelible.

Few of these remain, for the early Spaniards recklessly destroyed everything they deemed of value to the conquered Aztecs.

'Chita gazes long and earnestly at the celebrated fifty foot *maguey* paper which contains the entire history of Mexico. It tells how the Aztecs, centuries ago, left an island, in the north containing a temple, and came to Mexico, building the city. All important events are recorded. The advance of the Spaniards, and the battle of *Noche Triste* are faithfully portrayed.

"That island in the north, "says 'Chita, "certainly points to the Atlantis theory."

"No use to theorize," says 'Fonso, "Better come into the courtyard and look at those lovely flowers. It's hot in here."

They finish the day with an evening stroll on the

Alemada or public walk, and 'Chita is delighted, on their return, to find the following letter:

"New York, Sept 5, 1866.

My Dearest Little Pet:—If both Uncle Earnest and yourself were not such 'highly proper' people, I should certainly think you had run away for good for we have not heard a single word from either of you. What's the matter?

Things go on about as usual, except that I have a right brand new adorer—the oddest, queerest creature you ever saw—but, as my dear mother is constantly informing me, 'has piles of money.' My lady, you must know, has set her heart on my entrapping the poor innocent, and *entre nous*, I have set my *head* against it.

Our two noblemen deserted us ages ago. The Spaniard rolled his black eyes in the most enchanting manner when he asked your address, making numerous polite speeches, in such broken English, however, that I couldn't be certain whether he was complimenting me or you.

The Duke, I fear, was disenchanted by my reckless use of slang; for he has departed without 'screwing his courage' to the interrogation point! Oh, that I had cut out my troublesome tongue and cast it from me! for alas! such opportunities come only once in a lifetime.

But 'twas ever thus from childhood's hour. Then, he was so handsome, and the title—I must confess that would have 'fetched' me quicker than anything else.

Entre nous, my love, Harry and I are engaged; but as yet it's a dead secret. Are you not surprised? I am, but find it quite delightful

Mamma suspects nothing, for we are very formal before her and all gossiping friends.

She, you know, wants me to marry hard cash, so, of course, would object seriously to Harry, who, you know, is by no means a millionaire.

I shall say nothing to her ladyship till we talk Uncle Earnest over, then *he'll* do the fighting, not I.

Now, dear child, don't fall in love with your handsome cousin and desert us entirely.

Think how miserable I should be without you, to say nothing of my sweet, sweet parent's sorrow at having only one girl to scold.

With a kiss for your dear, good Aunt, and a hundred for yourself, I am, as ever, VIVA."

Conchita, of course, had long since seen the love between her two young friends; and now contemplated with wicked pleasure, the prospect of a domestic storm. For she knew one would follow Mrs. Paulding's discovery of the engagement.

CHAPTER XIV.

"CONCHITA," says the Senora one morning, "His Majesty receives this evening, and we are expected to pay our respects. Have you a suitable costume?"

"Well, really," returns 'Chita, "I don't know what would constitute a 'suitable costume,' so suppose you look over my things? I may have something that will do."

After a lengthy examination, her aunt decides on a pink silk, elaborately trimmed in black lace, a velvet bodice and black lace mantilla—the very costume in which 'Chita had once personated "a Spanish lady."

And now, as they sit in their carriage, *en route* for the palace, I will give the reader a bit of history.

Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, on establishing the Empire in Mexico, sought, by every means in his power to render this already beautiful valley more attractive.

The city had, unfortunately, been rebuilt on the ancient Aztec site, the lowest and most unhealthy in the whole surrounding country.

Concluding, wisely, to draw the town to a better

locality, he selected Chapultepec as his royal abode, and built many lovely drives, all leading to the palace.

The handsomest of these, also the most direct from the city, is the *Boulevard Emperiale*, three thousand seven hundred and fifty feet long, by one hundred and seventy wide. The east side is planted with two rows of trees, one edging the drive, the other, the walk, which is far wider than some streets

It is also contains six circular plots, which, the Emperor intends, shall contain statues.

On each side of this beautiful *paseo*, are grand old moss-covered acqueducts; one leading to the castle, the other going higher up the mountain.

This noble avenue, terminates with the castle, which completely covers the rocky "Hill of the Grass-hopper."

Now they pass the iron gate, guarded by its many sentinels, and drive through those grand, moss-draped cypresses, that centuries ago sheltered the peaceful Montezuma. Here, the sun never penetrates; and the mystic, shadowy twilight is wondrously productive of weird, fantastic musings concerning the countless generation, who, ages ago, roamed here at will.

A silver lake, bordered with lilies of the Nile, nestles, like a mirror in the green sward.

Playing fountains and brilliant tropical flowers add beauty to the scene, while birds of rare plumage flit here and there, mingling their songs with the melodies of falling water.

Our heroine feels no embarrassment as they enter the brilliantly lighted apartment, and advanced to greet the Emperor.

Maximilian, who is famed throughout Europe for his handsome person, scholarly attainments and courtesy of manner, receives them with marked graciousness.

He is especially kind to Conchita, and, knowing she is just from the States, turns to the distinguished looking lady on his right, and says:

"Princess, this young lady, I know, would enjoy talking America with you."

Acting on this hint, Princess *Josefa de Yturbide*, talks in her most charming manner to the young stranger.

This remarkable woman was the only daughter of the Emperor Yturbide. After her father's execution, the family moved to Philadelphia, and the princess was educated at Georgetown's convent.

Maximilian restored the titles to the family, and on adopting *Augustine Yturbide*, grandson of the late Emperor, appointed Princess Josefa guardian to the young "Prince Imperial."

She stands high at court, for, the Emperor, finding her possessed of wonderful executive abilities, consults her on all important occasions.

The Princess introduces her to Princess *Salm-salm*, an American lady, whose husband is Prussian, and they are discussing American towns, manners, politics, etc., when Alfonso, joining the circle, begs to show 'Chita the famous garden of Chapultepec.

They mount a magnificent stairway of imported Italian marble, and soon reach the house-top.

Here they find the beautiful garden filled with handsome trees, rare plants and shrubs, sprinkled by clear, sparkling fountains. Here and there, is a graceful marble statue, or a magnificent aquarium filled with gold and silver fish.

A bright, tropical moon sheds her lustre o'er this fairy scene at which Conchita gazes like one entranced.

Slowly she turns her eyes from the scene before her, to the soft green meadow, more than a hundred feet below, the stately avenues of trees, the faint, blue rim of distant mountains, then nearer still to grand old *Popocatapetl*, and beautiful *Ixtaccihnatl*, those silent sentinels, who, from all time have guarded this fertile valley—and joined in the hymn of praise all nature seemed singing to the great All Father.

But Senora Castro does not permit her niece to remain here long, for many friends are asking to be presented to the lovely girl, so honored by the Emperor.

Conchita, in the midst of a gay circle, suddenly feels that she is being stared out of countenance. Looking around to resent this rudeness, (Mexican *senors* are proverbial starers), she encounters the adoring eyes of Don Gonzalez.

"Ah," she says extending her hand, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

Many, many thanks adorable *senorita*, for your kind reception. I dared not hope for one poor word, when I saw you so completely surrounded. Ah, my heart! how it did leap when I beheld you. The very dress you wear, recalls that most entrancing waltz you once gave me. Oh, to hold you again in these arms, and float through its dreaming mazes once more!"

"My friend," she says, "be careful. I like not such extravagance."

"I will be good," he answers, "circumspect. May I see you to-morrow?"

"Certainly you may. My aunt, I know, will be pleased to receive any of my friends. That is she talking to Princess Josefa."

Senora Castro receives the Spaniard with much courtesy, giving the desired permission to call.

Alfonso, under the circumstances, behaves beautifully.

His jealous temperament was fully aroused, on seeing Conchita, *his* personal property, attracting such attention; yet, he mused, with a feeling of pride, "this beautiful creature will one day be mine."

But suppose she should fancy some one else? Had she not smiled enchantingly upon the Spaniard? Who was this *Don Gonzalez*, anyhow, where had they met, how long known each other? Were they intimate, did *she* love him? The Don, of course made no secret of his feelings, but what of hers? She was changed, of late, was *this* the cause? These, and many other wild fancies racked his brain, but outwardly he was calm, polished, courteous.

But all things have an end, and he is not sorry when the evening is over; for it has been, to him, more pain than pleasure.

CHAPTER XV.

"CONCHITA," asked Alfonso, "shall we visit the floating gardens this morning?"

"Not this morning," she answers, "I am expecting Don Gonzalez."

"Then," he says, inwardly cursing the Spaniard, "suppose we consider the engagement made for to-morrow?"

"I shall be delighted if it suits auntie. *Adios* till we meet again.

As they kiss each other on either cheek, true Mexican fashion, the Don is ushered into the *sala*. The gentlemen bow stiffiy, 'Fonso immediately withdrawing.

"Beautifully *Senorita*," says the Don, passionately kissing the hand she gives him," without you I can not live! Be my wife, sweet *senorita!* Only come to me, and I will be your slave!"

"*Senor*, "she returns, withdrawing her hand, "this is quite unexpected."

"I will wait, my angel! Give me but one ray of hope!"

"But, we are almost strangers—how do you know you really love me?"

"How do I know?" he cries passionately, "Does

not my heart beat for you alone? I dream of you by night, I think of you all day. You are with me always, every hour, every minute. No, *senorita*, I *can not* mistake. Should your blast my hopes forever, I *must* love you while life is mine!"

"Dear friend," she answers gently, "you cannot know how sorry I am—but, I cannot consent. I should be happy, indeed, to return your love—but cannot."

"The *senorita*, is already betrothed to her handsome cousin?" he asks suspiciously.

"No, I love him as a brother—nothing nearer."

"Then I may hope? I may try to win your love?"

"No, understand me, please. I shall probably never marry. It is kinder to tell you this at once. Now, will you forget all this, and be my good friend once more?"

"Oh yes," with an effort, "we shall be *friends*—and you will be kind, you will receive me? Your presence is my life?"

"Yes, you are always welcome. What, going?"

Adios Senorita, I shall repay your goodness. *Never* shall my consuming passion annoy you! Locked up in my heart, shall I keep it!" reverently kissing her hand, he leaves the house, nobly struggling against his unfortunate love.

And Conchita? she is really pained at this proposal. Why, could she not love him?

He is handsome, noble, rich, devoted,—what more could woman ask? Why, did not her heart go out to him? She can't understand.

Two weeks later, Mr. Greyson arrives, to escort his ward home, but she begs to remain with "Auntie."

"You are certainly old enough to know your own mind," he says." Of course, you understand *my* wishes, but do just as you please."

"Then, my dear guardian, with your permission, I shall remain where I am."

"Have you any reason for this decision, or is it caprice?" he asks sternly.

"I have reasons, but prefer keeping them to myself," coolly.

"Conchita, be frank with me. Do you love your cousin?"

"Dearly!" she says, seeing how she can gain her point.

"But child, think of the unsettled condition of Mexico—it is really unsafe."

"Shall I desert my loved ones?"

"You can return later, when this trouble is settled."

"Oh, I am sure even Juarez and his republicans won't murder Auntie and me. Really, Mr. Greyson, I should be miserable in New York."

"Well child," with a sigh, "you must be happy at all costs. Have you any letters for Viva or my sister? I shall leave to-morrow."

"I must certainly write to Viva. Would you like to see her last letter?"

"No; I received one just before leaving New Orleans, which told me the latest social gossip. By the way, I see our summer acquaintance, Don Gonzalez is here. Is he, too, seeking your smiles?"

She frankly tells him of the Spaniard's courtship.

"Why refuse him so decidedly?" asks her guardian, "could you not give the poor fellow a little hope? Consider, he is rich, handsome, noble; you

would have the *entree* to the very best European society. Do you love your cousin well enough to forfeit all of these things?"

"I tell you, as I did the Don—I shall, probably, never marry."

"What!" in a relieved tone, "you forget Alfonso. 'Oh constancy, thy name is *not* woman!'"

"Don't laugh at me," she pleaded.

"Come," he says gravely, "look me straight in the eye, and tell me your real reason. It is *not* Alfonso?"

"You are not my Confessor, and have no *right* to my inmost thoughts," she answers indignantly.

"You are right, I have not," then abruptly, "Conchita could you marry a divorced man?"

"No," she answers slowly, though positively, "I *could* not. Both my church and conscience forbid it. Though I loved passionately, *wildly*, I should never marry a divorced man!"

"You are right," he says, "though 'twould be hard, if you really loved—one. There, run on, and write your letter."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE political affairs of Mexico went rapidly from bad to worse.

Maximilian, now completely deserted by Louis Napoleon, and, knowing the storm would soon burst upon him, thought it wiser to remove to the strongly fortified town of Queretaro, about a hundred miles from the City of Mexico.

There he was followed by many adherents who thought themselves safer nearer the imperial army.

Senora Castro, accompanied by her niece, was among the first to remove to this charmingly situated city; for how could she desert her dear boy? And he, of course, must remain with his majesty.

The last French regiment had sailed, but Maximilian positively declined returning to Europe although he knew almost certain death awaited him in Mexico.

Poor Carlotta had accomplished nothing in her interview with Napoleon; and, when the Pope, her last hope, failed her, she became insane.

Peshaps, therefore, her beloved "Max" cared nothing for his life, and really longed for the Mexican bullet to end the sorrowful struggle.

The French had no sooner left, than the patriotic *Juarez*, feeling sure of the countenance, if not sup-

port, of the United States, determined to strike a decisive blow.

An army under *Esbedo* besieged Queretaro, but the Emperor with his ten thousand held out bravely.

Alfonso, though only a Captain, was held in great esteem by his superiors.

Though none would acknowledge it, their situation was becoming more desperate every day.

One morning, May 10th, while conversing with Miramon, Alfonso remarks:

"I am much afraid of treason, General."

"Whom do you suspect?" asked his general in alarm.

"I greatly distrust Lopez," returns he.

"Nonsense, my dear boy," returned the relieved officer, "why, Lopez is working just as ardently as you or I. You are certainly mistaken."

"I sincerely hope I am; but somehow, I cannot overcome the feeling."

"Go, my dear fellow," continues his general, "and amuse yourself with your pretty cousin. I fear too much work and anxiety will cause you to grow suspicious of even me."

"Well," thinks 'Fonso, "I have done my duty in warning him."

He enters his mother's *Sala*, and finds that lady and Conchita conversing with Don Gonzalez.

"Come here, 'Fonso," said his cousin, "and let me tell you of my letter. I received it in the strangest way. I noticed a red silk handkerchief on my balcony this morning, and, on picking it up, found this," holding up a letter.

"And it is from——?"

"My guardian," she interrupts. "He writes from

New Orleans, saying he can arrange with our enemies for my safe conduct from Mexico, and begs that I will join him immediately. My answer, he says, will reach him, if placed just where I find this."

"Ah!" exclaims 'Fonso, "that looks like a traitor in camp. But you, Conchita, what will you do?"

"Stay where I am, thank you."

"*Senorita*," urges the Don, "I implore you; accept your guardian's offer. This place is not safe—it may fall any day."

"Would you have me forsake my nearest and dearest?" she asks, with flashing eyes. "No, I shall remain with them to the bitter end."

"God bless you my darling child!" cries her aunt, embracing her warmly.

"I cannot *express my* thanks, Conchita," says her cousin, gravely. "If I mistake not, mother will need you sorely."

"Why 'Fonso, what do you mean?"

"I am *sure* of nothing, so don't worry over my doubts," he returns gravely.

Four days later his suspicion proved true—Lopez betrayed his Emperor.

Maximilian, and his brave generals, Miramon and Mejia, were taken prisoners on the *Cerro de las Campanas*.

Senora Castro and her niece ascended to their housetop, and straining their eyes, watched for the Emperor.

Long and earnestly they prayed for his success. Even though her eyes were strained to the utmost, and every nerve in her body seemed alive, the Senora dropped her beads.

Presently, Conchita sees *Juan*, her cousin's man-

servant, staggering towards them, bearing a seemingly lifeless body. Divining at once that it is Alfonso in this unhappy condition, both ladies forget battle-field, Emperor, Republicans, fury of enemies, their own safety, and hasten to his relief.

They bear him tenderly to his own room and apply restoratives to rouse him from the faint. They look for wounds, but find only one, near the heart, from which very little blood flows.

Senora has just left the room for some pet remedy, when the poor fellow opens his eyes.

"'Chita—darling," he says faintly, "don't try to staunch the bleeding—it is internal. I—must—go—soon. Give me—your hand, love—'tis sweet to die thus!"

"Oh 'Fonso! my dear, *dear* brother, don't talk of dying," she cries in great distress.

"Dear one," he whispers more faintly, "will—you kiss me—once—just once—darling—on the lips?"

As she bends her head and gives a long, tender kiss, a look of quiet happiness over-spreads his face.

His mother enters with a bottle, but waiving it aside, he says:

"Mother, it is no use—I have only—a few—moments—left. Bid me good bye."

"Holy Mother of God, save my boy!" cried the poor lady, frantic with grief. "Alfonso, my darling, do not leave me!" but he only smiled peacefully, and, with one last, tender look at 'Chita, closed his eyes and—died.

The poor mother's grief was intense, for Alfonso was her all. In person she implored the haughty conqueror to permit her son the customary funeral rites, and even the stern enemy could not refuse.

After the funeral they leave this city of beautiful

fountains, but sad, sweet memories, and return to the City of Mexico. Here Senora Castro will remain till she gains heart to form some definite plan for the future.

Conchita determines to remain with her, but her plans are materially changed by the receipt of the following letter:

"NEW YORK, May 26, 1867.

"DEAR CONCHITA:

"Come home immediately.

"Have written our friend, Don Gonzalez, to arrange your journey.

"Would come for you myself, but am called to Paris on business of importance.

"Let *nothing* hinder your return.

Your affectionate guardian,

E. GREYSON."

CHAPTER XVII.

"AH my dear friend," says Conchita, as the Don bows himself into the room, "I have been longing to see you!"

"Senorita is too good! You need me—I can be of service?" his dark eyes beam with pleasure.

"Yes," she returns, "you received a letter from my guardian, asking you to arrange for my return to the United States?"

"I did, sweet lady, and come now, to place my poor services at you disposal."

"Thanks. I wish to return as quickly as possible. What do you consider the safest and most rapid conveyance to our nearest shipping point?"

"Private conveyance. I shall secure a pass from General E———, which will ensure our safety. The whole country, I hear, is full of Juarests."

"I do not fear them," she remarks," for I too, am republican."

"Poor Maximilian and his generals will suffer, I fear, "remarks the Don gravely."

"I fear so," she returns sadly. "Though republican in sentiment, I greatly admire Maximilian's character. He is a grand noble man, but nothing will save him from the concentrated fury of my fiery countrymen."

"Yes," he assents, Mexico has endured many wrongs, but she will probably never get a better government than the enlightened one she has just overthrown.

Look at the improvements His Majesty had begun. It is a great, a sad mistake."

"Yes," she says, "it is the saddest mistake in all history. The Emperor is not at fault,—he was basely betrayed—a victim to French fickleness. Napoleon's ambition and cowardice are at the bottom of Maximilian's troubles. Mexico, for many years has been trying to throw off the effects of the centuries of oppression, bloodshed and cruelty she has endured. Now the climax is reached, and Maximilian must be the victim!"

For a few moments they are lost in gloomy reflections; then, the Spanaird says:

"I will call later, Senorita, and tell you of our plans. By the by, what does your aunt say to giving you up?"

"She thinks it best for me to obey my guardian."

"Doubtless the Senora is in despair at her great loss. *Adios* senorita, I kiss your feet."

Conchita begins the packing for she knows, if possible, she will leave the next day.

"Auntie," she remarks, as that lady assists in folding sundry garments, "I wonder why he wrote such a short positive note? His letters are usually so kind and gentle. Can he be angry that I staid with you?"

"Perhaps some business troubles annoyed him," wisely suggests the kind lady.

"Well," determinedly, "I shan't worry—for this is the last day we shall have together for a long, long time."

"Yes, dear child, it may be our very last. You will marry in a few years—if not months, then I must give you up entirely.

"Don't distress yourself on that point—I don't think I shall *ever* marry—at any rate, not for years and years to come."

"You think so now, because you have never loved," says her aunt, sighing over her own broken dream of 'Fonso's marriage.

"Ah," exclaims 'Chita with a short, quick sob, "I have not?"

"No, dear" continued her aunt, "but when it does come, you will speak very differently."

That afternoon, Don Gonzalez informs our heroine that he had completed all necessary arrangements for the journey.

"We shall be ready, then to leave at six, to-morrow morning?" he asks.

"Why," in surprise," are you going?"

"Certainly, unless—you forbid."

"Forbid! I am only too delighted" she says, much pleased.

"You are more than kind, sweet lady!"

"Indeed, the goodness is all your own. You have no idea how I dreaded that long lonely trip."

"Ah, dear friend, you know not the rapture it gives me to serve you in any way!"

"Fear not!" he exclaims, as an alarmed look comes into her face. "I swear, by the holy cross, we both hold sacred, to cherish and protect you from all harm, as though you were my own sister! Can you not trust me senorita?"

"I can, dear friend, with both life and honor. I have *implicit* confidence in your true nobility of character."

Thanks! A thousand thanks! and we shall always be the dearest, warmest friends?"

"Always, Don. *Nothing* can break our friendship."

"Then, *adios*, senorita. I will be punctual to-morrow," and, kissing her hand, he withdraws.

* * * * * *

After many stoppages, and other inconveniences, they arrive in New York, and finally alight in front of Mr. Greyson's home.

"Here Conchita is received by the porter, who informs her that, "The Mistress said you might go straight to your own room, and I was to tell her the minute you arrived."

"Very well, Simpson, Don Gonzalez, Mrs. Paulding I know, would like to return thanks for your kindness to me. Won't you come in?"

"Thanks, senorita, I will call later."

"Then good bye, till then."

"*Adios Senorita.*"

'Chita is scarcely in her room before Viva rushes in to greet her.

"Oh you dear, darling old thing!" she exclaims, between numerous hugs and extra kisses, "you haven't the least idea how dreadfully anxious we've all been! I was so afraid you'd be mixed up in those awful troubles and get murdered, or imprisoned or something."

"Well, my dear," says 'Chita coolly, "you see I was neither murdered nor——'*somethinged.*'"

"Oh, you provoking piece!" exclaims Viva, "Is this the way you repay my loving anxiety? Base ingrate! to ridicule my mode of speech! Never mind, Miss Particularity, I shall punish you severely

—you shall hear none of my love affair! There now! Are you not sorry for your abominable conduct?"

"I rather think, my dear," laughs 'Chita, "that the punishment would fall heavier on yourself—so pray, don't inflict useless suffering."

"Oh, 'Chita," she says, forgetting her resolution, of silence, "I've got such quantities to tell you! You remember, I wrote you of my engagement? Well, Harry worried so, that I let him tell Uncle Earnest, who was quite kind, and promised to talk mama over. But my sweet mother opened the vials of her wrath upon our devoted heads and I seriously doubt if any human being could ever reconcile her to the match. My gracious! It was a day to be remembered! 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us' from such another!"

"Does she still oppose it?"

"Yes, my sweet, but we shall run away, some day."

"Why, Viva, you would not, really?"

"That depends, my love—but, the enemy approacheth! 'Arm ye brave!'"

Enter Mrs. Paulding in her stateliest manner.

She gives Miss Merle a cold, unsympathetic little kiss, then remarks pleasantly, "So, you *are* back again, but I wonder that you were not punished for your obstinacy."

"Many thanks, Mrs. Paulding for your *gracious* reception. Did your brother leave me a message?"

"Earnest? No, why should he? Poor fellow! He has been harassed enough by your stubborn refusal to leave Mexico. He said to me, just before he left, and I give you his exact words, 'Would to God I had never seen her!'"

Conchita's black eyes flashed angrily, but her voice is coolly indifferent as she remarks, "In little more than a year he will be relieved of me. It was kind of you to repeat his flattering speech; and, I appreciate the motive, fully as much as the remark."

"I see," retorts the elder woman, "that Mexican society has improved neither your temper nor your manners. I leave you, Miss Merle, till you learn to conduct yourself more properly."

"Thank the Lord that's over!" exclaims Viva, as the door closes on her indignant parent. "Don't you think, 'Chita, that her temper sweetens with age?"

"But Viva," says 'Chita, deeply wounded, "how could your Uncle make such a remark? I never thought he considered me a torment!"

"My dear girl, you know my angelic mother's ways. I have no idea he ever said it—however, he'll be home in about two weeks, so you can ask him all about it."

"Indeed, I shall not! I only wish I'd stayed with Auntie."

"No my child, he would not allow it. He would have gone for you himself—and you would have obeyed. You don't know how determined he is. Honestly, I think the old fellow was afraid your handsome cousin would steal you away from him. My Uncle is selfish, *petite*."

"Don't talk so, Viva. Perhaps you have not heard of poor 'Fonso's death?"

"Oh, 'Chita, I'm so sorry! We heard of the fall of Queretaro, the capture of the Emperor and his generals, but supposed your cousin safe."

"He died nobly," says 'Chita, "a soldier on duty.

I am glad his end was in defense of the Emperor he loved so well—for Mexican court martials are mere farces. They mean certain death. To be shot down like a dog!"

"I don't mean to be unfeeling, but forget Mexico and her troubles, and lie down—you really need a nap. Mama and I are going shopping, so I must don my street dress. Shall I send you something to eat? Louise, I know, will be charmed to bring it."

"A cup of chocolate, please, in about an hour. When will you return?"

"Can't say, may lunch down town. Don't get lonesome."

"I'll amuse myself unpacking. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEFT to herself, Conchita slept till Louise entered with her chocolate. Then, refreshing herself with a bath and fresh clothing, she goes to the library.

Here everything reminds her forcibly of her guardian.

His arm chair, foot-stool, the basket of torn letters, an open book, turned face downward, all brought happy memories of those dear, quiet hours spent in study. Would they ever return she wondered? Or did he really regret the trust, imposed by his dying friend?

Going to the piano, placed there by his kind thoughtfulness, she raises its lid, and is about to run her fingers over the ivory keys, when she discovers a small package, addressed to herself, resting upon them.

It is a small velvet case, round which is wrapped the following note:

"My Dear 'Chita:

In looking over a collection of antique jewels I found this. If you can willingly leave your Mexican relatives, and stay contentedly with me, wear it till I return. Then, we may better understand each other, and be happier than before.

Think of me always as, Your loving

Guardian."

She opened the box with an exclamation of pleas-

ure, for there lay the lovliest, quaintest old ring she had ever seen! On a slender band, a mere thread, was set a tiny four-leaf clover, brilliant with diamonds.

"How lovely!" she cries. "And how good of him to think of me! Of course I shall wear it." She slipped it upon her slender finger and turned it slowly to watch the sparkle.

"My dear Guardian! He is not tired of me after all. How could I believe him unkind?"

But she had not a little teasing from Viva, who was very curious to know all about the new ring. Conchita somehow, shrank from explaining that it came from her guardian: for well she knew the supercilious looks and unpleasant allusions to "poor Earnest's infatuation" that Mrs. Paulding would heap upon her.

So, when Viva exclaimed, "Oh, 'Chita! Where did you get that queer old ring?"

She answered simply, "It was given to me."

"By whom? The giver has excellent taste. My! how I wish my adorer would give me such a beauty —though mine *is* handsome," looking lovingly at the solitaire on her left hand. "Come, tell me all about it. I see it is your engagement finger—are you to marry soon? And who is the happy man?"

"This is no love token," says 'Chita, blushing deeply "simply a gift from my dearest and truest friend—my—"

"Oh, I know!" interrupts Viva. "It's the Don! We met him while shopping, and he will call tomorrow, as we are engaged for this evening. How lovely to have such a nice rich beau! I do not envy you, however, for I saw Harry too; he sends his regards and says he will call soon. I guess we shall

have another row with my sweet mother when Uncle Earnest comes, for I can keep Harry quiet no longer. He must wait till then, or take me without any wedding finery. White satin, kid gloves, and orange blossoms are very dear to my heart, but I should not dare to broach the subject without Uncle Earnest's support."

So Viva rattled on, changing the subject before 'Chita could correct her mistake.

A week passed, still another, but no Mr. Greyson appeared.

Conchita filled the vases each morning with fresh flowers, and kept the library in perfect order for his reception—still, he came not.

The Don had bidden them good-bye, and sailed for Spain—called home on important business.

Harry and Viva were so wrapped up in each other that 'Chita was much alone.

This evening, she sits in the gathering shadows, singing Mrs. Hemans' beautiful "Evening Song to the Virgin."

Clear and deep rings out the exquisite melody, and each word, coming from her very heart is distinct and full of feeling.

"Ave sanctissima,
We lift our souls to thee,
Or a pronobis,
'Tis night-fall on the sea.

Watch us while shadows lie;
Far o'er the waters spread
Hear the heart's lonely sigh,
Thine too hath bled.

Thou that hast looked on death,
Aid us when Death is near.
Whisper of Heav'n to Faith,
Sweet Mother, sweet mother, hear!"

A man enters quietly and steps unseen behind

the inspired singer; he looks hungrily into her sweet face and presses his lips to the dark masses of hair coiled low upon her neck.

"Ora pronobis,
The wave must rock our sleep,
Ora, Mater, ora,
Star of the Deep."

The last deep tone has died away, when, dropping his hands to her shoulders, he says, softly:

"Conchita! Are you glad to see me?"

"*Very* glad, sir."

"Prove it, my darling! Give me a kiss from your own sweet lips.

"No," he answers, as she turns her cheek, "I want your lips. Just once, Conchita! What! must I take it by force?"

Folding her in his arms he kisses eyes, brow and lips in such an ardent, *possessive* manner, that she pleads:

"Oh, *dear* Mr. Greyson, *please* let me go!" in a vain effort to hide her face, she unthinkingly drops her head on his shoulder.

"That is right," he says, lovingly pressing it closer to his heart.

"Oh, let me go!" making vain efforts to free herself.

"Never!" he says, "Till you promise to stay with me *always*."

"You are cruel!"

"Cruel, my darling? Don't you know I love you madly—better than life itself? Look up, my sweet—tell me, can you love me a little?"

"Don't" she exclaims in horror, "have you forgotten that woman ——"

"I hope to, love," he interrupts, "with your help. Thank God she can trouble us no more. I buried

her a month ago—there can be no mistake. Now, sweet-heart, you *shall* tell me—you love your cross old guardian?

"With all my heart!" she whispers shyly, looking down.

"Then put your arms around my neck—close, and say, '*Earnest, I love you!*'"

Blushingly she obeys, saying softly, "Earnest—I—love you."

"And will marry you," continues her instructor, "one week from to-day!'

"Oh no!" she exclaims, "that's too soon."

"Not a bit of it! I want you *so* much pet,' pleadingly.

"But, when people—marry, they should get a lot of dresses and——"

"Nonsense! Do I want you, or your clothes? I shall cable Worth to have a complete *trosseau* ready when we arrive in Paris. We will send your measure, complexion, and eyes, leaving the rest to his exquisite taste. *My* wife," with a fond kiss, "shall not be tormented by worrying dressmakers. I want her all to myself."

"But your sister?" says Chita, "she will be so angry!"

"I can hold my own," he answers proudly.

"But please don't tell her—yet."

"Why love, how can I have you to myself, if they know nothing of our plans? I am too selfish to care for other company."

"Don't you remember," she says artlessly, "they rarely ever come here."

"And you will meet me often?" he questions eagerly.

"When you like," she says, sweetly.

"Good girl!" with a satisfied smile, "she shall have something pretty," he feels for some object in his pocket. There is a flash of diamonds as he places the ring upon her finger.

"Little darling!" he exclaims, seeing his former gift, "you wore my ring! You were willing to stay?"

"Yes," she answers, "it was a great comfort to me; wearing it seemed to bring me nearer to *you*."

"What did you think, sweetheart, when you read my note?"

"That you were kind and considerate."

"Not that I *loved* you?"

"No, I never dreamed of that."

"And you, sweet, when did you begin to love me?"

"I don't know—I only found it out that—that day at New Orleans."

"My own darling! I thought you *despised* me then. I have loved you, pet, almost from the first. You have no idea how jealous I was of Don Gonzalez and your cousin."

"Poor 'Fonso," she sighs, "he died nobly."

"Better death, love, than life without you."

"Oh," she cries, "let me go! I hear some one coming."

Kissing her passionately, he quotes:

"I can not leave thee,
Though I say,
Good-bye, sweetheart,
Good-bye!"

"*Adios, Senor*," she returns demurely, slipping from the room.

* * * * * * *

A few days later Mrs. Paulding discovered her

brother's engagement, and the good lady's anger knew no bounds.

She entered the library one morning, to consult her brother on some little business matters, when to her *horror,* she saw him seated on the sofa, his arm around 'Chita's waist, her head upon his breast, her beautiful black eyes looking love into the face, bent with such adoring tenderness to catch her every whisper.

"Earnest Greyson!" fairly yelled his enraged relative, "what do you mean by such *outrageous* conduct?"

"What do I mean?" he answers coolly, "why my dear sister, I mean—in short—*matrimony!*"

"One would think, "she retorts bitterly, "that *one* trial of matrimonial bliss (?) would satisfy you."

"Well, you see it has not," then, very politely, "if that is all, we will excuse you."

"And does that artful jade know your wife is living?" she inquires angrily.

"This *lady,*" drawing 'Chita still closer, "who, in a few days will be my wife, is thoroughly acquainted with my past. The person you so kindly allude to, is dead."

"Dead!" she exclaims, "I have my doubts. Mark my words—nothing but shame and misery will come of this marriage! But I've nothing to say—absolutely nothing! I wash my hands of the whole affair." With scornful mien, she walks in stately anger from their presence.

"She almost makes me feel that we are doing wrong," says 'Chita with a little shudder. "What if I bring pain and suffering to you?"

"Why darling," he answers tenderly, "what ill

can befall us, so long as we love and trust each other as now?"

"I don't know. But I dread something—I know not what!"

"Come pet," soothingly, "think of something else. Shall we go direct to Switzerland or tarry a while in Paris?"

"Oh," she says, diverted at once, "nature first, by all means! Art can wait."

Viva and Harry, on hearing of the approaching marriage, determine, in spite of all opposition, to be united by the same ceremony.

"I never would have believed it of 'Chita!" laughs Viva, "never! I will always suspect all quiet girls, after this. They are 'deep, sir, deep, and sly, *devilish* sly!' But I'm so glad—we'll all marry and go off together. It's just simply lovely!"

"And pray," asks her mother's cold, sarcastic voice," in what will you clothe yourselves? You have nothing—literally nothing!"

"Oh well," laughs her saucy daughter, "we can go South, and emulate Mother Eve's noble example."

The few day before the marriage are filled with much shopping, packing, unpleasant remarks from Mrs. Paulding, but delightful love talks with their adorers.

The double wedding is a very private affair, and the happy party starts immediately for Europe.

"At last," says Earnest, as Conchita and he stand on deck, watching the land slowly fade from sight, "I feel that you are my very own!"

"It is so strange," she answers, slowly turning her wedding ring, "that this, and a few solemn words can so change our lives."

"Delightfully strange," he returns with a happy laugh. "But pet, I have some sad news."

"Is Auntie——"

"Auntie is quite well. My news is political. Maximilian, Miramon and Mejia were—shot, on the 'hill of the bells,' June the nineteenth."

"How horrible! But I feared it all along. Poor Carlotta!"

"Come, love, forget it all—tell me, now that the world is before us, are you quite content, can you trust your whole happiness to me?"

"I trust you perfectly, utterly!" she whispers softly.

"Then may God deal with me as I do with you, my wife!" he answers reverently.

CHAPTER XIX.

OUR bridal party has spent a month among the glorious Alps.

They have scaled the *Jungfrau*, gazed with mingled awe and admiration on the eternal snows of *Mount Blanc* and the *Matterhorn*, walked upon the wonderful *Mer der Glac*, listened to the clear reverberating songs of numerous shepherd lads, and sailed on the calm waters of blue Lucern.

Viva now craves a change, and insists on going to Paris, being presented, and plunge into French society.

But 'Chita is unwilling to leave these lofty, snow-capped summits, poetic legends, and their ideal life for the unsatisfying gaieties of brilliant Paris.

"Well, my dear *aunt*," laughs mischievous Viva, "we shall stay one week longer; then you positively *must* go with us; I have just set my heart on being presented with your own handsome self. Besides —my court dress is lovely! Almost as beautiful as your own."

"And you are dying to wear it?" questions 'Chita.

"Of course! Ar'nt you?"

"Not especially."

"Then, madame, you don't deserve such gowns!

I'm *ashamed* of you! One would think you had been married *thirty years* instead of *days!*" exclaimed Mrs. McAlister indignantly; for the little lady delighted in dress and society.

One day, towards the end of 'Chita's week of grace, they are overtaken, on the mountains, by a blinding rain-storm.

"There is a house near by," says the guide, "but," crossing himself devoutly "the old woman that lives in it is a witch!"

"Lead on!" cried Mr. Greyson, "if in league with Satan himself, she *must* shelter us!"

A short walk brings them to dilapitated old hut, on the door of which their guide raps loudly. An ancient crone opens it wide enough to protrude her head, and asks in French, "What do you want?"

"Shelter, good woman, for the love of God!" cried Earnest.

"Enter," she returns, shortly.

A few coals smoulder on the open fire-place, and round these our half frozen tourists gather.

Their hostess takes no further notice of them, but sits with open, staring eyes, like one in a trance.

The storm rages furiously. The wind howls horribly, then moans and sobs like some wild creature in agony.

But our party are too busy thawing themselves to be awed by these wierd surroundings.

By and by they spread their lunch upon the floor, and invite the old woman to join them; but she is too absorbed in her stony gaze to heed them.

At last the storm subsides and Conchita, approaching their eccentric hostess, says:

"We thank you greatly, Madame, for your timely

shelter. Will you not accept this," offering her purse, "as a token of our gratitude?"

"I want not your gold, lady," answers the woman, "but listen——" grasping her hand in a strong, magnetic clasp, "you are in danger—great danger! *Go not to Paris,* you will be miserable!"

"Why madame," returns Chita in amaze, "my husband can protect me."

"No, child, he will be powerless! None can help you. *'Tis written*—your happiness will be but *ashes!* Beware of the *black-eyed woman*—she hates you—will separate you from all you love. Beware! *my spirits never lie.* Farewell, Conchita—*remember!*"

'Chita's hand slowly falls to her side, and the prophetess once more resumes her visionary state.

"Come, darling," says Earnest, seeing how agitated his wife had become, "let us leave this uncanny place. No wonder you are frightened. Don't think of it pet."

"Oh Earnest, my husband, I fear some evil!" cries 'Chita, much distressed. "How *could* she know my name, or that we were going to Paris?"

"She is probably a mind reader," he returns. "Don't distress yourself, sweetheart. What *could* part or make us unhappy?"

"Be patient, with me, dearest—I know not what I fear!"

She is really much distressed by the strange warning. Though not permitting herself to *believe,* yet she fears some hidden evil; an unaccountable feeling of terror possesses her when Paris is mentioned.

Viva tries to laugh away this "superstitious crank," but poor 'Chita receives her gay remarks,

as she does Mr. Greyson's serious reasoning, in *dumb despair.*

"Conchita," said her husband, "this is unlike you. Be brave, my darling! If danger *must* be encountered, should we not meet it at once?"

"You are right," she acknowledges." *Uncertainty is killing!* Let us start to-morrow."

"Plucky little woman!" he cries, kissing her fondly.

"And Earnest, if anything *should* happen——"

"Nothing will happen, my sweet!"

"You will always love me—just as you do now?"

"Nonsense, pet! I *could* not love you less."

Next day they leave for Paris, and plunge at once into the gayeties of that charming city.

Viva's long wished for presentation at last takes place, and the girls attract much attention, both for their beauty and exquisite toilettes.

Though constantly on the go, they are "doing Paris" leisurely; each according to his or her own taste. The gay capital is no novelty to Mr. Greyson, so he goes submissively, wherever his young wife leads.

This morning we find them in the *Louvre,* admiring its priceless works of art.

"How exquisite!" she exclaims, stopping before one of *Tintoretto's* famous pictures. "Is not that coloring beautiful? Those flesh tints are simply perfect! They remind me of Titian."

"Ha! ha! My sweet innocent," cries a mocking voice, "so I've found you at last!"

"Blanchette!" cried Mr. Greyson, turning deathly pale. "My God! can the dead live?"

"Not so, my *dear* husband," she answers, a cruel light in her eyes.

"How *could* I leave you desolate? But look at Madame—she faints! *Mon Dieu!* she loves you much! Ha! ha! ha!"

'Chita certainly looks faint, but motions him away, and leans for support against a massive column.

"Tell me, you *fiend in human shape,*" cries Earnest in angry despair, "how you managed to deceive me! Did I not place you in your coffin, and see you buried?"

"You did, my sweet lord. *That* was my little game. Blanchette is wise; she knew you loved the young innocent. Did not your eyes declare it—that night in New Orleans? So, loving you *so dearly,* she formed the little plan to complete your happiness. Ha! ha! *Revenge is sweet!*"

"But your death?" he asks sternly.

"Chut! Is it possible *Monsieur* has not heard of the great mesmerist C——? what more easy than a *hypnotic slumber?* I could rely on faithful friends to rescue my poor body. *All* are not so unkind as my dear husband. Ha! ha! How does the new wife feel? I wish you joy, sweet innocent! 'When shall we three meet again?'" *Adieu Madame,* may you be happy! Ha! ha!" and with a fiendish laugh, she disappeared as suddenly as she came.

"Conchita," says Mr. Greyson, "my darling wife—"

"Oh, no!" she cries with a shudder, "do not touch me! I am *not* your wife, have *never* been! O God! what shall I do?"

"Dearest, listen to me. Legally, and morally you *are* my wife. That *fiend* is nothing to me. No power in *heaven or hell* can separate us save—your own will."

"Holy Mother!" she cries in anguish," help me to decide."

"Come, love," he says tenderly let us go home."

"*Home!* I have no home! Oh, why did I leave my own sunny land?"

"Come, Conchita, this is no place for private discussions," He takes her arm, walks silently through the building, enters a cab and is rapidly driven to their hotel.

"Now, dear child," he says, as they reach their own rooms," be perfectly open with me. You know I would give my life to ensure your happiness."

"I am too stunned for thought," she answers. "Leave me, please, and—don't let Viva come in."

"No, dear love," bending to kiss her, but she shrinks from his caress. With a sigh he leaves her.

Alone with her own heart, Conchita fights a long fierce battle.

"Leave him at once," says Conscience, "he is *not* your husband. Life with him will be nothing less than adultery. 'What *God* hath joined, let no man put asunder.'"

"But," whispers Inclination, "*did* God join him to that wretch? Was it not the devil's own work? You *are* his wife—by the great love you bear each other, by your kinship of feeling, by that wondrous magnetic chord which unites your very souls! That complete *oneness* is given only of heaven. Listen to your heart—'*God is love.*'"

"The heart is deceitful;" urges Conscience, "heed not its pleadings."

"Conscience often commits great crimes," suggests Love, "*Love* comes from *God,* and is *holy, pure, unselfish!* Think how he adores you, how

happy you have been, how miserable you would be apart. Think of his lonely life—can you have the heart to leave him? Will you be content? You are *so young*—think of the long, sad years you must spend *alone, alone, alone!*"

"*I cannot give him up!*" she cries, in agony.

"Dear child," says Conscience, "think calmly. Your mother, the Church, forbids the indulgence you crave. Consider your early training, the beautiful prayers you learned in childhood, the vows you took at confirmation—our holy mother would grieve over your shameful sin. Can you cut yourself off from her consolation, give up the holy communion for the mere gratification of self? Purify your heart, O! child of earth—reach out for lofty ideas, holy aspirations. Seek to become more like the *great Eternal*, and '*A peace, that passeth all understanding*' will fill your heart."

"But," ventures Worldly Wisdom, "*what will society say?* Have you thought of the scandal 'twill cause? Go quietly on with your married life—there is no sin. You were both deceived. Drown your sorrows in gaieties, remember—'There's a skeleton in every household.'"

"Oh holy mother!" prays the poor distracted girl, "Guide me aright, help me O Father, to do my duty—make the way plain for thy poor, miserable child. Give me strength to follow thy command!"

By degrees, she becomes calm, and when Mr. Greyson returns can talk quietly, almost dispassionately.

"It is best, dear," she says sadly, "that we separate—but we need have no publicity. Viva and Harry will return soon, and till then, I will pass as

your—wife. Of course, you will have your own apartments, but—*they* need not know."

"And afterwards?" asks her husband, whose well controlled face is like a marble mask. "Have you thought of that?"

"Yes, I shall remain, to study Art in Rome. And you—you have always your business."

"And must I never see you, never know if you are living or dead?"

"It is best so."

"Would you be happier?'

"I should suffer less."

"It shall be as you desire. I will do all in my power to render you less miserable."

"Thank you so much for your kind unselfishness. I know how terribly you suffer."

"Do not think of me, pet. It is the thought that I, who love you so very dearly should have brought this blight on young life, which distresses me so."

"Oh my darling?" she cries, throwing herself into his arm. "Grieve not that we love. Your love is my *brightest jewel*—one that will never grow dim!"

"Thank God!" he says, kissing her almost reverently, "we can *love*, and *sin not*. *'Love is eternal'* and lives, even after *death*."

CHAPTER XX.

THE first few weeks of her altered life are very trying to poor Conchita.

No matter how sad she feels, she *must* appear gay and happy so long as Viva and Harry are with them.

At last, to her intense relief, they return to America, and she settles in earnest, to begin her Art work.

Instead of going to Rome she procures comfortable apartments in the old Latin quarter, so well known for its picturesque settings, and joins a class of American students who are making a brave fight for art and fame.

This she does for companionship, well knowing the gay bohemianism of her comrades would aid largely in making her forget self.

Time is a great healer; and now that two years have passed, Conchita really enjoys her work.

Hers is a truly artistic nature. Possessed of a good eye for form and color, a fine understanding of light and shade, a thorough knowledge of perspective, a dainty touch at scumbling, she has that subtile perception, genius, or what you will, which puts *actual life* into trees, animals and human figures—lights the face with expression, and makes all objects depicted seem perfectly natural.

She is now putting her whole soul into a "ten-by-seven" foot canvas for the *salon*—"The Last Kiss." The setting sun sheds his last brilliant rays over a deserted battle-field. The back-ground of distant blue mountains, nearer snow-clad summits, and soft green foliage, reminds one forcibly of Mexico. Dead soldiers, broken pieces of artillery, guns, canteens, spent balls, and various implements of war, are scattered over the grassy plane, which forms the middle distance. In the immediate fore-ground lies an officer, wearing the uniform of Imperial Mexico. A stream of blood flows from his heart. His face, though remarkably handsome, is stamped with an unmistakable presence—*Death!* His dark eyes look wistfully, hungrily, into those of the beautiful, white robed girl who kneels beside him. Her face is full of sad emotion, as her tremulous red lips meet his, in one last, lingering kiss.

The reader, of course, will easily recognize the principal figures. Our artist, feeling so deeply on the subject, makes her faces, attitudes and surroundings intensely life-like.

Mr. Greyson, during these two years, has remained in Europe, travelling over many lands—anywhere, everywhere—away from his own, unhappy thoughts.

He had, within the last month, been recalled home to take charge of a difficult law case.

Regularly, once a month, Conchita heard from him—a pressed flower, a cluster of ferns, a new book, a tender poem, a rare engraving—never a letter—reached her from time to time.

She makes no sign, though she passionately kisses the address *his* hand had written, and lays each

one tenderly away among his few treasured letters.

Viva writes long, gay epistles, full of her happy home life; numerous gaieties; what a dear good fellow Harry is; "actually my dear, he really grows better with time, and is as devoted as ever.

"But you—you headstrong piece—I shall never forgive you if you keep up that art craze any longer.

"What do you mean by it anyhow? Have you and my respected uncle quarreled? You must have some grave reason for acting in this cold-blooded way. If he was'nt the *best* man in the world (Harry excepted) he would not stand such treatment!

"Here he has been over a month and I am *sure* hasn't heard a word from you—for when I ask, he assumes his most freezing manner and I *wilt* completely.

"Mama, I know, makes it hot for him. She is eternally tormenting me to know if I noticed any disagreement between you—the idea of two such devoted people quarrelling on their wedding tour!

"But really, 'Chita, all nonsense aside, I wish you would come home. I *know* Uncle needs you, though he would die before he'd complain. I do believe he is turning grey—he looks so worn and tired all the time.

"You know, dear, its a woman's duty to look after her husband.

"Do you think I would leave my Harry? No indeed! Neither art nor science, fashion, nor any other craze could make us part voluntarily!"

"Alas!" thinks Conchita, "How little she knows

of my fearful struggle; but 'break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.'"

Exhibition day at last arrives, and 'Chita's delight is unbounded when she sees her picture well hung, and attracting general attention.

No joy can exceed the exquisite thrill of rapture which fills the breast of a real artist on seeing the creatures of his hand and brain, appreciated by capable critics. It is pure, elevating, *ecstatic*—for a time.

"*Madame,*" says an obsequious picture dealer, "what will you take for your painting?"

"It is not for sale," she answers quietly.

"But," he persists, "Madame may command her own price—a wealth Spaniard desires it much, and cares not for money!"

"I shall not sell," she returns decidedly.

Bowing politely, he departs, but returns in a few minutes, saying:

"Pardon, Madame, *Monsieur*, the Spaniard, *insists!* He implores madame to grant an interview. Is it so? Madame is gracious? *Merci Madame!*"

Away he hurries, returning, shortly with our old friend, Don Henrique Gonzalez.

"Ah," she exclaims, giving her hand, "what a delightful surprise!"

"Many thanks, dear senorita! The joy is mine. Never did I dream of such bliss as meeting you here! Ah! I see you, too, look upon the picture I covet. Is it not fair Mexico? And see, the face is your very own! I want it much, I *must* have it—but my agents say the artist is *obdurate!* I *must* have it—your beautiful face! though, I despair! lead on!" to his guide, "I will return, *senorita,* I go to implore this cold-hearted painter! *Adios!*"

"You need not go," she says, with a smile. "It is myself you seek."

"*You senorita?* Then indeed, I despair?"

"Not so. I cannot dispose of this—it has been my very *life*—but you shall have a faithful copy."

"Many, many thanks, sweet *senorita!* I am your slave! Your goodness is beyond compare. But—I knew not you were in Europe. Your gay young friend, and your grave guardian, are they not with you?"

"No *senor,* I am alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes; I have been here two years, studying art."

"Two years, and I knew it not!" then, admiring the beautifully finished work before him, "*Senorita* is a great artist! She will be famous, sought after, admired! But oh, beloved *senorita,* leave it all and fly with me to sunny Spain—my castle shall be your fairy bower—I, your slave! Come, sweet lady, come with me!"

"Hush, *senor,* I implore you! do you not know—have you not heard—that—that I am already married?"

"Senorita, *torture* me not! You only try me—is it so?"

"No, dear, kind friend, it is true."

"And your husband—you love him much—you are happy."

"*Senor,* if you really love me, ask no questions."

"Ah, he is a brute! Where is he? Him I will kill!" fiercely.

"No, dear friend, you *cannot* understand. He is *grand, noble*—and I love him devotedly!"

"But you are not happy," looking long into her sad eyes.

"I *cannot* explain," sadly.

"*Senorita,* you suffer—tell me all! I am no longer your lover—but your faithful friend, your slave! Let me help you."

"Thank you, my noble friend. God alone can help me."

They converse long and earnestly, and, as she rises to return to her lodgings, he hands her his card, saying, "I shall not intrude, *senorita,*—will not follow to your home; but, if you need me, send to this address. I will fly to you instantly.

They say farewell, and she turns slowly homeward.

In crossing the *boulevard St. Germain,* she sees a woman knocked down by a runaway team. A policeman picks up the unfortunate victim, and a knot of idlers gathers round.

Conchita, prompted by a passing curiosity, joins the circle just as the policeman asks:

"Does anyone know this woman?"

"I do," she answers quietly, "it is Blanchette—the actress. Call a cab, please, I will take her to my own rooms."

"She is a connection—a sister?" glancing from one handsome face to another.

"A connection," she says promply, fearing she will be taken to the hospital. "Bring Dr. ——— to this address," giving her card to a newsboy, "and you shall be well paid."

The doctor, who arrives shortly after the sufferer has been put to bed, looks very grave after his examination. He finally shakes his head, says something about "concussion of the brain," gives a few instructions, and bows himself out.

At last Blanchette opens her eyes, and, seeing the pitiful looks of her faithful nurse, exclaims in wonder:

"Ah, the sweet innocent! But where am I—what is the matter with my poor head? Ah?" as memory returns, "those dreadful horses ——!"

"You must be quiet," interrupts 'Chita, "Talking will make your head worse."

"So this is a hospital, and you my nurse—is it so? Ha! ha! what happiness to be so tended. But where is our grave husband? What pain he would suffer to see poor Blanchette so helpless! Ah, the pain, the *pain!* I suffer! Give me morphine, chloral, *anything* to ease this torture!"

Conchita sends again for the doctor, but he only shakes his head and tells the young nurse her charge is beyond help.

"She will surely die before morning, Madame—I can only deaden the pain with opiates. No human power can save her."

"You are positively certain of this?"

"I would stake my reputation, Madam,"—proudly—"she will probably die at midnight."

Conchita, true to her Catholic training, makes an effort to save this poor soul.

"Blanchette," she says gently, "you are very ill. Let me send for a priest."

"Ha! ha!" laughs the sufferer, "I shall not die! No, sweet innocent, I care not for your priest—opium, give me opium and peace! Haste! or this awful pain will kill me. Doctor, you I implore—opium—or I die!"

The physician administers an opiate and retires.

Blanchette, still watched by 'Chita, slumbers uneasily.

As the little Swiss clock chimes the solemn hour of midnight, her restless, unruly spirit passes quietly into the great beyond.

. . . . . .

Earnest Greyson, as he sits in his law office, certainly looks older, and graver, than when we last saw him. His rich brown curls are slightly sprinkled with grey, and a few wrinkles of care have formed about both mouth and eyes. Now that he is alone, a look of sadness settles over his face.

"Cablegram, sir," says a messenger boy," any answer?"

He opens it leisurely, but starts hurriedly to his feet as he reads:

PARIS,———.

"Come at once. CONCHITA."

"Yes," he answers, looking hurriedly over the time-table of the Ocean Steamship Co. Finding what he wants, he writes rapidly,

"Will start in two hours. EARNEST."

Let us skip the tiresome voyage, filled with such mingled hope and fear—rapture that she should want, should send for him—anxiety for her welfare. Why had she sent? was she ill—perhaps dying, and he so far away? could it be ——"

Time moves on "leaden wings," but the train finally reaches bright, beautiful Paris, and a well paid cab-man soon deposits him at 'Chita's door.

"Yes, Madame is in her *atelier*," the polite *concierge* informs him. "This way, *monsieur*. Perhaps *monsieur* wants to see Madame's picture? See, here is the door—what name shall I announce? What? *Monsieur* is a friend of Madame's? Ah, *merci! monsieur!*" as he drops a coin into her willing hand.

He opens the door noiselessly.

There she stands, under the skylight, her white dress well covered by her long painter's apron, busily working on the Don's picture.

He watches her a moment, then as she lay aside her brushes, hangs her palette upon her easel-peg, and steps back to criticise her work, he opens his arms, and cries:

"Conchita, my darling! come to me!"

With a glad cry she nestles in his arms and is pressed close, close to his heart.

"You wanted me?" he asks.

"She is dead," she whispers softly.

"Thank God" he cries reverently, "nothing can part us again."

END.

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